

# Talking to Families in Leeds and Sheffield: A report on the first stage of the research

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November 2001

## **Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion**

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## **Acknowledgements**

Most importantly I would like to thank all the people who have given their time so willingly to be interviewed during the course of the study. This work would have been impossible without the support of the parents involved and all the workers in the local areas who have helped me to make contact with parents. Not only have I been made very welcome in homes but also in community centres, schools, nurseries, baby clinics, playgroups and children's centres. I would also like to thank the two City Councils and the local Health Authorities in helping me to gain access to the areas and for supporting the study.

Thanks also to Rebecca Morris, Nicola Harrison and Jane Dickson for their administrative support throughout the first round of interviews and in the production of this report.

I would also like to thank Anne Power, who directs the study and has made substantial contributions in the drafting of this report. I am also very grateful to Katharine Mumford who did so much work in setting up the London study and to Ruth Lupton, John Hills, Tania Burchardt, Bani Makkar and Elizabeth Richardson at CASE who commented on earlier versions of this report along with local residents, community workers and representatives from the two areas.

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This study has been financed by the Nuffield Foundation, to whom we are very grateful, and has also benefited from the support given by the Economic and Social Research Council for the work of CASE as a whole.

# Summary of Findings

## 1. The study

The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) is interviewing 200 families with children (under the ages of 18) in four low-income areas in England. Through successive rounds of interviews we are trying to understand how area conditions and area changes affect people who live locally. We are exploring people's views of their neighbourhoods and of initiatives in the areas as well as their own experiences of how change impacts directly on individuals' lives. Our aim is to find out about and document the ways in which areas improve or decline as local families see it.

The Neighbourhood Study in Leeds and Sheffield is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and is the second part of the neighbourhood study started in two areas of London in 1999 (Mumford, 2001). The two areas of Leeds and Sheffield are also part of CASE's 12 Areas Study (Lupton, 2001). This parallel study is tracking 12 low-income areas across England and Wales from the 1991 Census to 2006.

## 2. The neighbourhoods

Kirkside East is a large estate in Leeds where the Council owns nearly three-quarters of the homes. The Valley is a mixed tenure area, stretching out of Sheffield city centre where about half the property is council and housing association owned and the rest is private. Both areas have high unemployment rates and high proportions of lone parents, children under 16 and working age adults not in work, study or training, compared with the national averages. Kirkside East continues to be a predominantly white, working class area. The Valley is much more ethnically mixed with over a quarter of residents from a minority background. It has some large, Victorian privately owned houses, which attract young professional couples. Each area has around 20,000 inhabitants. Both areas are unpopular in the wider community, creating empty homes that allow people to move around the areas. People who need a quick solution to their housing problems, often in desperation, move in. This helps explain the higher than average moves around the areas. There was a strong sense of general untidiness in the areas, especially in Kirkside East.

## 3. The families

I interviewed 50 families in each area between June and November 2000. I made contact with families through baby clinics, local groups, community centres, and schools and through families already interviewed. We aimed to represent the local populations as closely as possible in work patterns, family structure, housing, income and ethnicity. Where contacting families tended to weigh the sample too heavily in one direction, I pursued new and different points of contact. The families we interviewed broadly reflect the populations in the two areas.

65% of our interviewees receive state benefit (excluding child benefit) and 57% of all adults in the families were not working, studying or training (compared with 25% nationally). More of the families are lone parents (43%) than nationally (24%) (General Household Survey for Britain 1998/99) and 75% of our parents have children under the age of 11. A high proportion of the families have lived in the areas for only a short time.

## 4. Families' views of the area

The first round of interviews has told us a great deal about how families find living in the two areas. There are problems in both areas including rundown and empty properties, patchy

public services, high fear of crime and drugs and high dissatisfaction with the areas as places to bring up children. But there are also some positive things happening in the areas including new investment and regeneration programmes, active community groups and local attempts to overcome the negative reputations that stigmatise the areas.

Most families identify with their very local areas. Most feel familiar and safe immediately around where they live but are less confident about venturing beyond their immediate neighbourhood. 20% of the families I interviewed in The Valley and 32% in Kirkside East were dissatisfied with their area as a place to live compared with 13% nationally. Boarded up houses and half empty blocks of maisonettes make parts of the area look abandoned and increase tenants' isolation and insecurity. Residents miss neighbours next door, along the street or in the rest of the block. Most empty property was council owned.

The repair, maintenance and modernisation of homes are major concerns for council tenants in both areas. It is not just frustration with the physical conditions of their own homes that affects tenants however. Tenants in The Valley feel insecure and unsure about the rapid deterioration of their properties. They feel uncertain therefore about the future of their property. Might this lead to demolition or refurbishment, involving temporary or permanent relocation for the family? In round one of the interviews, parents simply did not know the answers to these questions.

Parents identify problems with their area more generally, as well as with their property, as making them want to move. 36% of the families in Kirkside East and 48% in The Valley wanted to move out of their current accommodation. Tenants are more likely to want to move because of the state of their property, especially council tenants. But bad relations with neighbours, local decline and a desire for change often prompt people to move away from their immediate area. Unhappiness with the area as a whole drives people out, if they can afford to move. On the other hand, children, friends and finances often tie people into their neighbourhood.

## **5. Places to live and bring up children**

Many residents like their immediate neighbourhoods and think that conditions are improving, but many do not think of where they live as an easy place to bring up children. 46% of families in Kirkside East and 34% in The Valley were dissatisfied with the areas as places to bring up children. Parents worried about how to offset negative influences and dangers in the area. Both areas have facilities and activities for children but their populations of children under 16 are above the national average, placing enormous demands on local youth provision. The shortage of supervised play activities in both areas compounded parents concerns about drugs, negative peer pressure and road safety. Although parents were positive about some play areas, some organisers and some activities, in both areas many parents felt that local provision was inadequate and 'patchy'.

Many families feel that their areas are sometimes dangerous, that streets are unsafe play spaces and that they are surrounded by threats that they cannot control. The areas they live in have particular intense problems of poverty, crime, and drugs. The communities that were once vigilant have dwindled and fractured and many now favour keeping 'themselves to themselves'. Parents talk about their own childhood, both inside and outside the areas as generally freer from fear.

Parents struggle to offset negative influences on their children's behaviour. Many parents felt that in the past children had more carefree lives but were more disciplined. Now children are

more restricted in their activities and have to be more aware of dangers like drugs. But they also felt that parental controls were often weaker and some children were “rough” and “rude”.

## **6. Community spirit**

Nearly half the families in both areas felt that community spirit existed whereas many more, three-quarters of the families in both areas, felt that community spirit mattered. Neighbours were the most important source of community belonging, often offering concrete help with children and many kinds of care. Parents felt that community spirit promoted friendliness, trust and security and made the areas better places to live. Parents from some ethnic minority groups described how they felt a part of their own strong communities. In The Valley, people saw organised community activities as helping to tackle issues across the area. In Kirkside East, the informal exchanges of friends in community centres and within smaller community groups were important in some parts of the area

People felt that community spirit made the areas better places to live where people could come together to fight problems. Overall the large majority of families wanted to know that they could rely on their local community in times of need.

## **7. Race**

Most parents in The Valley brought up the subject of race spontaneously whereas in Kirkside East (a mainly white area) it was barely mentioned. Families welcomed diversity in the area and felt that The Valley’s multicultural character was positive. But many also talked about tensions between different groups, particularly with children in the area. Some families mentioned increasing segregation in the local schools and the lack of resources for pupils with English as a second language as major worries. Some also talked about how the area was stigmatised by stereotyping from the outside.

The 40 parents who commented on race relations revealed many different attitudes. Only four parents were wholly negative. All these were white British and resented the changes in the area. The majority (24) had mixed views, feeling positive about the contact and the generally good relations between races but worrying about prejudice, friction and lack of resources. Twelve parents had a clearly positive view of race relations in the area but eight of these worried about wider racial attitudes and the pressures on schools to cope with language barriers and refugee problems. There was a general worry about the growing concentration of refugees in the area and whether this was becoming an unmanageable drain on resources.

Many parents feel more at ease because their children are accepted in the area and are being brought up in a mixed neighbourhood, whereas in other areas they might suffer from racism or be less racially aware. On the other hand, parents recognise the problems and tensions between different groups in the area, especially conflict between children. Some parents link these tensions in the community to stereotyped images held by those inside and outside the area. Parents of different backgrounds and races are worried about the same sorts of things – ethnic tensions, school segregation and high concentrations of disadvantage – but also value similar things – good race relations, understanding different cultural traditions, a sense of community, people being friendly towards each other.

## **8. Schools**

Parents tended to use local information networks to make their school choice, as well as considering their children’s needs, distance, and, at secondary level, where their child wanted to go. Parents knew that local schools often underperformed in national terms. But they



preferred their children to go to neighbourhood schools and they liked the security and ease of contact this brought, especially at primary level. Parents of 86% of the children in both areas were satisfied with the schools their children attended. Those who chose local schools often highlighted the positive aspects of their school while being aware of its poorer reputation locally and more widely. Parents praise their local schools for their neighbourhood character, their good facilities, their friendly environment, cultural mix, and positive approach to children. They supported clear rewards and controls over behaviour and they liked links from the school to the local community.

At secondary level, the division between schools and parents, and children and parents is greater. Some parents send their children out of the area or move away because of secondary school problems but many parents would still prefer local schools at this stage because they feel it is safer.

Most parents were confident about helping their children with homework at primary school. But fewer were confident when it came to secondary school. Parents were positive when the schools helped them to support their children. But some lacked the confidence to make use of such support.

## **9. Changes in the area**

Government and local authority regeneration initiatives are targeting both areas. Some community-based groups in The Valley are working to tackle specific area problems and needs. Many families recognise the areas' potential and point out where things are improving in particular streets, rows of houses or blocks of flats. However, as many families again felt that there was little change in the areas or that things were actually getting worse, especially crime and drugs. Initiatives including adult education, Lifelong Learning and Sure Start were popular in Kirkside East, and in The Valley a local community forum was actively working to improve the image of the area and the local environment, helped by a local glossy magazine funded through New Deal for Communities. Sure Start was also very active in The Valley. But fear of crime and drugs swamped positive feelings for many. People who have lived in the areas for a long time and those who are involved in community activities appear to be the most positive.

## **10. What would help**

Over half the families in each area felt that a little more money would have helped them most at the time of interview. In The Valley nearly half the families wanted more and better services and activities for children. Just under a fifth of the parents in each area thought that moving would help their families. Work was also important, both getting jobs and keeping them. Other things that would help were home improvements, better health, better transport and help with a particular child's needs. Sometimes people just wanted less tangible things like improving the family's well-being, gaining confidence, spending more time together and resolving family problems. Seven people said that they couldn't think of anything that would help their family immediately, adding that they were 'content' as they were.

## **11. Conclusion**

Poorer families, the large majority in both areas, struggled with neighbourhood problems and insecurity about the future. All families shared worries about their children's development. But most families valued, relied on and wanted to protect their immediate neighbourhood and the local community. This feedback gave us the sense that there was something to be built on in these neighbourhoods and that life within them could be made far better.

## **Part One: About the study, the areas and the families**

### **1.1 Introduction and Method**

The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) is undertaking a qualitative, longitudinal study of families with children (under the age of 18) in four areas in England. Through successive rounds of interviews we are trying to understand how area change affects people who live locally. We are exploring people's perceptions of their neighbourhoods, of change and initiatives in the areas as well as how the experience of change impacts on individual's lives. Our aim is to find out about how families experience the ways in which areas develop or decline.

The Neighbourhood Study in Leeds and Sheffield is funded by the Nuffield Foundation and is an extension of the Neighbourhood Study in two areas of London, reported in Mumford (2001). The two areas in Leeds and Sheffield are also part of CASE's 12 Areas Study, reported in Lupton (2001). This baseline report will be followed by more detailed investigation of the two areas and families' experiences of how they are changing.

#### **The 12 Areas Study**

The 12 Areas Study is tracking 12 low-income areas across England and Wales (from the 1991 Census) onto 2007 (subject to funding). The areas being studied are in Hackney, Newham, Knowsley, Nottingham, Newcastle, Sheffield, Blackburn, Birmingham, Caerphilly, Redcar and Cleveland, Leeds and Thanet (Glennester *et al*, 1999).

The 12 Areas Study aims to 'establish and explain the current direction of change' in the areas. Using local statistical data and qualitative information the study has two main objectives:

- to document and explain multiple dimensions of change at local level
- to understand these changes, and the interactions between them, from the perspectives of those involved. (Lupton, 2001, p15)

For a detailed account of how the 12 areas were chosen, what data is being collected and how the study is progressing see Glennerster *et al* (1999) and Lupton (2001).

#### **The Neighbourhood Study**

##### **London**

The areas being studied in East London are in Hackney and Newham. The fieldwork for the London study began in 1998. Katharine Mumford interviewed 50 families in each area over the period of 6 months, from September 1999 to February 2000. The method of data collection and report of this first round of interviews in London is available from CASE (Mumford, 2001). Second round interviews were carried out between May and December 2000 and the findings from the first two rounds will be published in the next year (Mumford and Power, forthcoming). Bani Makkar, the new Research Officer for the London areas, is continuing the East London study and completed the third round of interviews in the areas in September 2001.

##### **Leeds and Sheffield**

Once the fieldwork was underway in East London the Nuffield Foundation agreed to fund a parallel Neighbourhood Study in Leeds and Sheffield. This work started in May 2000. The researcher for this post is based in Leeds. In this and all other published material we call the

areas in the study Kirkside East (Leeds) and The Valley (Sheffield) rather than identifying them by the actual names

## Method

The Leeds and Sheffield Neighbourhood Study focuses on two areas of approximately 20,000 people each. These correspond approximately to ward boundaries and include areas that have been targeted by regeneration initiatives and local authority developments. The study was designed to follow the same course as the East London study but to allow for flexibility in pursuing issues that are particularly relevant to Kirkside East and The Valley (for a fuller description of the method see Mumford, 2001). We are focusing on families' experiences of change in the areas through successive rounds of semi-structured interviews, at nine month intervals, with 50 families in each area.

In preparation for making contact with families inside the areas we consulted with the city councils. This allowed us to do three important things in developing the study. First we made local workers and organisations aware of the study, second we found some appropriate contact points for meeting potential interviewees, and third we adapted the interview schedule slightly to reflect current local developments such as the Community Involvement Team in Leeds and New Deal for Communities in Sheffield. We also organised local bases in each area, a permanent base in a community centre in Leeds and a variety of coffee stops in Sheffield. Table 1 lists the meetings held with Council employees and local workers before and during the first round of interviews.

Spending time amongst local groups and at local facilities is an everyday aspect of the research. I am often made aware of things happening in the local areas in the same way that families are, through notices, leaflets and by word of mouth. My notes on moving in, out and around the areas by public transport, walking and driving, along with my own experiences of events and changes provide a record of my own relationship with the areas, adding a reflective element to my experience of local changes.

**Table 1: Meetings held between May and November 2000**

<b>Kirkside East</b>	<b>The Valley</b>
City Council Regeneration and Planning – Key contact.	Young Children's Service
Youth and Community – Head and Community Centre worker	Sure Start Board
SRB5 Meeting	Community Health Development worker, health visitor and Young Children's area coordinator
Community Involvement Team – Locality coordinator	Somali Education worker
Family of Schools/Adult and further Education – Centre manager	Youth Centre manager
Multi Agency Support Team - head	City Council Area coordinator
Health Visitors Team Leader	Women's Resource Centre manager
Primary Care Group Area Co-ordinator and Community worker	Black Community Forum manager
Sure Start manager	City Council Education worker
Sure Start workers	Local area housing office
Pilot regeneration meeting	Children's Centre manager
After school childcare project	Young Children's Centre manager
Community liaison officer at high school	Community health workers
	Police
	Community Centre worker
	African Caribbean community centre manager
	New Deal Baseline Audit organiser

## **Interview Schedule**

The interviews are semi-structured; combining open ended and structured questions, some taken from national surveys (quantifiable) to allow for broader comparisons. These national surveys include the Housing Attitudes Survey (Hedges and Clemens, 1994), questions used by the Basic Skills Agency and the DETR's residents' surveys in seven Single Regeneration Budget areas (carried out by MORI). The questions in the first interview covered the following areas:

### *family:*

- tenure
- household composition
- ethnicity
- marital status
- employment status and occupation
- qualifications
- income
- housing history
- access to a car and telephone.

### *families' views of the area:*

- reasons for moving in and out
- satisfaction with the area as a place to live and to bring up children
- good and bad things about the area
- changes taking place including reference to specific initiatives
- how others see the area
- whether the area is getting better, getting worse or staying the same.

### *families' views of schools:*

- satisfaction with schools
- schools' reputations
- reasons for choosing schools and thoughts about future choice of schools
- how children are getting on at school
- homework.

We also include a short section on childminding arrangements.

### *families' views of community:*

- 'community spirit'
- involvement in local groups and activities
- proximity of friends and relatives
- contact with neighbours.

### *families' views of the future:*

- hopes for the family over the next two years
- children's destinations after leaving school – optimism and obstacles
- what would most help the family at the moment?

## Contacting Families

Following the experience gained in setting up the London study (Mumford, 2001, pp5-6) I made contact with families in the places families used locally. Table 2 shows where I met families.

**Table 2: Points of contact with families (number of families)**

Source	Leeds Kirkside East	Sheffield The Valley
Primary schools	10	5
Baby clinics	5	9
Sure Start <sup>a</sup>	13	0
Children's centres	2	10
Community centres	9	3
Nursery schools	1	5
Parent and toddler	3	2
Secondary school	0 (focus group with 6 <sup>th</sup> form)	3
Adult education	3	0
Women's resource centre	0	3
Youth Centre	0	1
Flier	0	1
Snowballing <sup>b</sup>	4	8
Total	50	50

a. Sure Start had not got underway in Sheffield so it was not possible to contact families via this route.

b. Contacting families through other families.

During the course of the first round of interviews I also conducted a focus group with sixth-formers at a local secondary school in Kirkside East and talked to refugee women in groups at a mother and toddler session in The Valley.

We set out to recruit families to reflect the make up of the local population. We aimed to reflect the broad characteristics of the local population using the following variables.

1. Housing
2. Ethnicity
3. Age of children
4. Marital/couple status
5. Income
6. Work

The methods that we used to contact people made recruiting to cover some of these characteristics difficult. For example by using snowballing we made contact with friends of interviewees who often had similar characteristics to one another. When this threatened to weight the sample too heavily in one direction we contacted new sources to target other parts of the local population. Although precise matching to the area profiles was impossible we did achieve a reasonable mix of families in both areas, reflecting all the characteristics we aimed for (see Table 3).

The open questions in the interviews gave people the opportunity to talk around issues. Using this qualitative data, along with tables of responses to the more closed questions we are building an initial description of families' views at the time of the first interviews. The same issues will be developed in further rounds of the interviews offering us the possibility of tracking change over time, both in the areas and in families' experiences of them.

## **The interviews**

We guaranteed anonymity for all families and we made it clear to interviewees that they were not obliged to answer any question they didn't want to. In the majority (but not all) of cases the interviews were with mothers. Only three were with fathers. Where other people were present at the interview I invited them to join in the discussion and recorded their comments separately. Ten of the Kirkside East interviews were done in the community centre where I am based and two of the interviews in The Valley were done in a local pub, the other 88 were done in the family home. Answers were recorded straight onto the interview schedule. I tape recorded 10 of the interviews in total. At the end of the interview I asked if the family would be prepared to be interviewed again in about 6 months time. All except one of the interviewees agreed to this. This woman was not confident in her use of English and said she would rather not be contacted again. I gave a £5 gift voucher for Boots to all the interviewees before leaving, as a token of our appreciation. All accepted.

All the interviews were completed between June and November 2000. The flow chart in Figure 1 shows how we developed contact with interviewees over time through new sources and snowballing from existing interviewees.

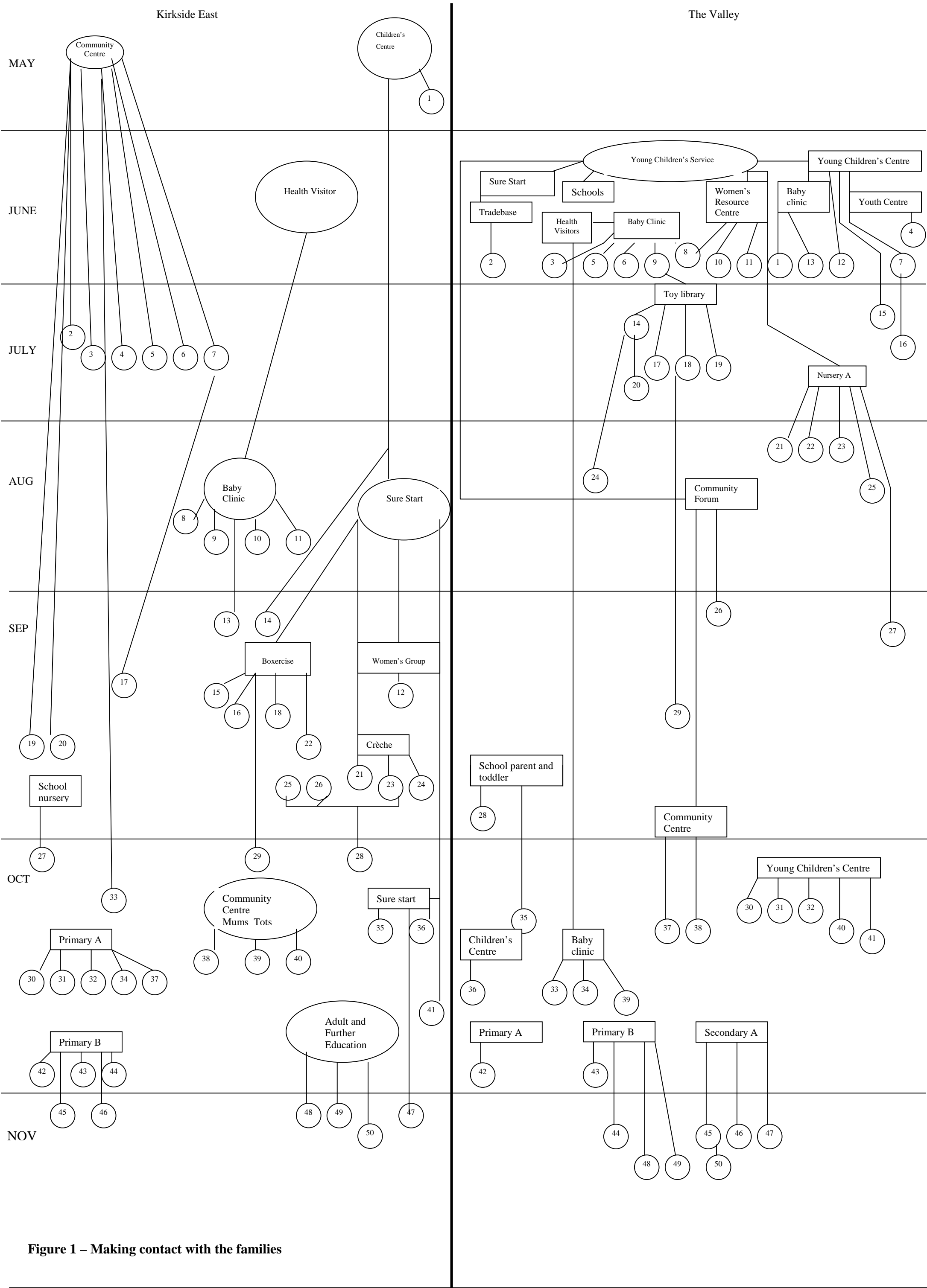


Figure 1 – Making contact with the families

## **1.2 Characteristics of families interviewed and comparisons with neighbourhood populations**

We asked families about their housing, ethnic background, income and employment as well as their family make-up, number and age of children. Table 3 below shows the characteristics of the families we interviewed compared with figures for Leeds and Sheffield and the country.

Both areas have far higher proportions of social housing than the city or national average. In Kirkside East this rises to nearly three quarters compared with 16% nationally in 1991. Partly as a result of council allocation policies there is half the proportion of ethnic minorities on the Kirkside East estate compared with Leeds as a whole, whereas in Sheffield there are four times the proportion of minority families in The Valley compared with the city as a whole. This reflects the lower proportion of council stock and more private accommodation. In most urban authorities in the North of England ethnic minorities are under represented in council housing compared with their representation in the population as a whole (Power and Tunstall, 1995; Power, 2001) The racial composition of The Valley is changing. In our sample sixteen of the parents we interviewed were from ethnic minority backgrounds, including those who were mixed race. The figures for school age children given in the ethnicity section of the report below show a rapidly increasing proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds.

The concentration of lone parents is far higher in the two areas than in either city, or nationally. Lone parents made up nearly half of our interviewees. The problem of 'work poverty' (no-one in the household either employed, studying or in training) is intense in both areas, with nearly half the families' incomes made up entirely of state benefits. This is more than double the national average. The proportion of lone parents in work, which is generally low across the country, is about one fifth of the national figure, although it is less extreme in Leeds than in Sheffield. Overall our families reflect the local tenure pattern but more are lone parents or without anyone in work.



**Table 3: Characteristics of the families interviewed and comparisons with local authority, regional and national averages %**

	UK <sup>a</sup>	Leeds	Kirkside East	50 families	Sheffield	The Valley	50 families
Tenure % in social housing	23 (1993) E&W	31 (1991)	70 (1991)	72	36 (1991)	52 (1991)	52
% ethnic minority population	5 (1991)	6 (1991)	2 (1991)	2	5 (1991)	26 (1991)	32
Lone parents as % of all families with dependent children	19 (1991-92) <sup>b</sup> 24 (1998-9) <sup>b</sup>	15 (1991)	27 (1991)	42	14 (1991)	26 (1991)	44
Work poverty <sup>c</sup>	25 (1991)	24 (1991)	38 (1991)	45 (18+)	27 (1991)	41 (1991)	51 (18+)
Lone parents in work as % of all lone parents <sup>d</sup>	35 (1991)	38 (1991)	26 (1991)	15	29 (1991)	20 (1991)	0

a. Or England and Wales where marked E&W

b. General Household Survey for Britain

c. Proportion of working age population not in work, study or training

d. Our families were possibly under represented in this category because we were less likely to meet with lone working mothers who would have time to spare for an interview.

### 1.3 Description of the neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup>

#### Kirkside East

Leeds has developed a reputation for an economy that is booming, largely as a result of the growth of the financial and business sectors in the city. In April 2000 unemployment matched the national average of 3.8%. Kirkside East is in the Inner Area, which includes 12 of the 33 wards in Leeds. In the Index of Multiple Deprivation (2000) 7 of these 12 wards (including Kirkside East) were in the 10% most deprived in England.

Kirkside East was built as an out of city council housing estate in the inter-war years. It is four miles from the city centre and has always been a working class area, although it has never been associated with a particular industry or employer. The population has fluctuated over the years. It rose to a high of 40,000 in 1961 and has continued to fall according to figures from 1981 onwards (Burt and Grady, 1994; Lupton, 2001). At 19,000 the current population is now less than half the 1961 figure. Kirkside East is an overwhelmingly white estate, having less than 2% ethnic minorities in 1991. In the city as a whole, based on evidence from the council, the demand for social housing has dropped by 15% since 1994/95. The Council owns nearly three-quarters of the houses in Kirkside East and a particular area of the estate is one of the least popular in the city with many homes in need of modernisation.

<sup>1</sup> See also Lupton (2001).

There are very definite entry and exit points to Kirkside East. Busy roads border the western and southern edges of the estate, there are fields and a stream to the East and woods to the North. There are lots of green spaces in the area and some small hills. Although the housing is mostly council built and tends to be fairly uniform in parts of the area, extensions to the estate in the 1970s mean that there is a mixture of styles across the area as a whole.

Kirkside East is a reasonably well-maintained estate with some patches of evident decline. There are whole streets of occupied houses and small parades of shops. At the start of the study (May 2000) a new shopping centre was being built and this, along with a local family learning centre has attracted a lot of local and some national media attention. In parts of the area, however, there are boarded up houses and shops that have been covered in graffiti, litter and rubble in the streets, furniture dumped in gardens and on grassed areas and vandalised play areas. In the first six months of the study I saw five cars that were burnt out in streets in an unpopular part of the estate.

Kirkside East ranks 388 on the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>2</sup> and second in Leeds on the Breadline Britain Index. There is a large proportion of public housing in Kirkside East (70%) and there are also relatively large proportions of lone parents, people who are economically inactive and those with chronic health problems. It has never been a wealthy area but there are signs that things have been improving recently. In April 2000, the rate of people claiming benefit as unemployed in Kirkside East was 10.39% compared with 11.53% in April 1996.

Educational attainment in the area is low. The average of the local primary schools, for those attaining level 4 in English (64%) and Maths (64%) at Key Stage 2, is lower than both the city (76% English, 73% Maths) and national averages (75% English and 72% Maths). In Kirkside East 17% of the children at the closest local secondary schools gained 5 GCSE passes grades A\* - C, compared with 40% in Leeds and 49% in England (all figures from 2000). In spite of this one of the local primaries was one of the 100 most improved schools in the country in 2000.

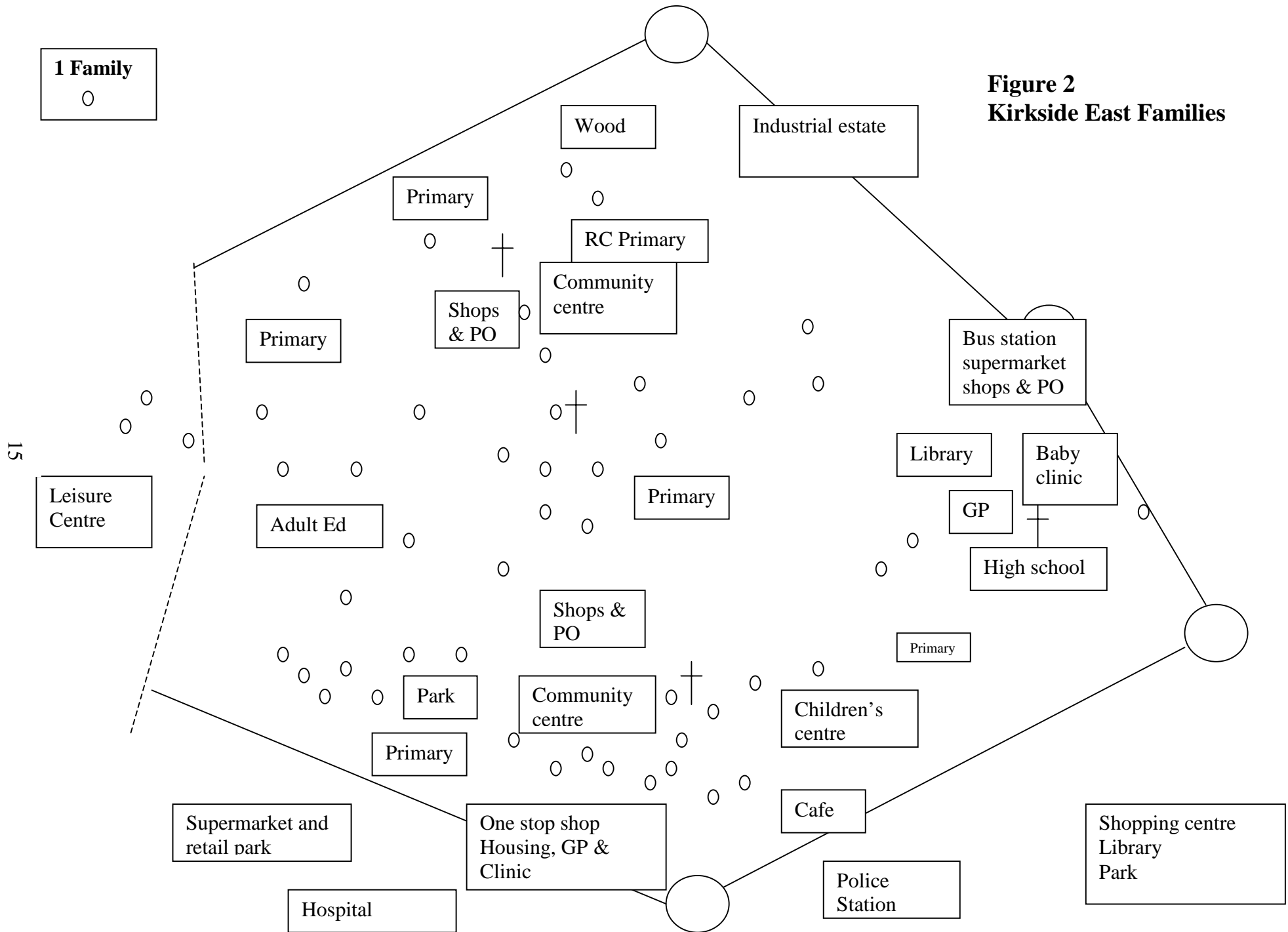
### Chart 1: Kirkside East

Housing and Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1930s social housing estate 4 miles from city centre:</li> <li>• Population about 19,000</li> <li>• Local authority housing estate with some housing association and privately owned houses. Semi detached and terraced family housing and local authority flats in tower blocks and maisonettes.</li> <li>• Overwhelmingly white population</li> </ul>
Transport
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buses into the City Centre - every 10 to 15 minutes. Journey time 15 – 20 minutes</li> </ul>
Schools in the area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 single sex secondary school drawing pupils from further afield</li> <li>• 6 primary schools, one of which is voluntary aided Roman Catholic</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> 388 out of 8,414 wards in Britain, where 1 is the most deprived. The index is compiled using a composite of various indicators.

Shops and Businesses in the local area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local industrial park</li> <li>• Three parades of shops with post offices</li> <li>• One large supermarket with surrounding shops, bus station, petrol station and bank</li> <li>• Pubs</li> </ul>
Adult Education and Lifelong learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family learning centre offers: Literacy, numeracy and key skills drop in centres IT, business and communications Art and design Languages Hairdressing Customised training facilities Variety of training programmes including New Deal Crèche</li> </ul>
Local information facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• One Stop Shop – Housing and Social Services information</li> <li>• Employment Services office</li> </ul>
Community facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three community centres offer: drop in facilities, adult education courses, mums and tots. groups, pensioners' lunches, youth groups and a Credit Union</li> <li>• Activities centre - breakfast club and youth group activities</li> <li>• Children's centre - parent and child activities, counselling and assertiveness training</li> <li>• Local churches – coffee mornings</li> <li>• Mums and toddlers groups</li> </ul>
Leisure facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports centre just outside the area</li> <li>• Small children's play area</li> <li>• Basketball court</li> <li>• Patches of green around the area – some with goal posts on</li> </ul>
Regeneration and funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single Regeneration Budget for part of the area</li> <li>• Sure Start</li> <li>• Health Action Zone</li> </ul>

Figure 2 shows how the families are spread across Kirkside East.



**Figure 2**  
**Kirkside East Families**

## The Valley

Sheffield's history has been dominated by the steel industry, which declined significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. The city as a whole has suffered from this decline but it is the northern, industrial part of the city that has suffered most economically. Although there have been attempts to reinvent Sheffield as a centre of sport and shopping, these have done little to stem the rise of poverty and disadvantage in parts of the city.

The Valley rises to the north of the city centre up a steep hill. There are some woods to the north of the area and to the west and the east the land drops away forming natural area boundaries. The mixture of housing in the area makes for some stark contrasts, with large detached and terraced Victorian houses giving way to smaller terraces and blocks of maisonettes.

The hill leading into The Valley, away from the city centre, has several shops along it. When the study started (May 2000) several of these were boarded up but were in the process of being renovated. Although renovation work and enveloping had started there was a look of general decline about parts of the area, along with some well maintained patches. Several of the streets are run down, some with large blocks of boarded up maisonettes and some with empty and dilapidated houses that are being left to rot. Many streets have litter and rubble strewn across them and some gardens of empty houses are filled with rubbish. There are some streets, though, that are well maintained and fully occupied.

The Valley is about a mile from the city centre at its closest point. In the past it has been reasonably wealthy. Those working in the steel works and the local hospitals originally occupied the large Victorian houses in the area. In-migrants coming to work in health and steel settled in The Valley and in other areas around the city in the 1940s and 1950s (Taylor *et al*, 1996). Between 1971-1991 The Valley lost 21% of its population and the wealth of the area diminished (Lupton, 2001). The ethnic minority population of the area has grown and now includes Pakistani, Yemeni, Somali, African and Caribbean communities. In 1991 26% of the population were from ethnic minority groups. Demand for council housing in the area is very low, reflecting the situation in the city as a whole and the number of purpose built maisonettes in the area, which are particularly unpopular.

The Valley ranks 60 on the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>3</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in Sheffield on the Breadline Britain Index. It is a mixed tenure area and is the most ethnically mixed ward in the city. The unemployment rate in The Valley is one of the highest in Sheffield but it is falling. In April 2000 the number of people claiming unemployment benefit was 15.95% compared with 19.75% in April 1996. The unemployment rates for the black and ethnic population are nearly four times those of the white population (Sheffield First Partnership, 1998). The Valley also has the highest rates of infant mortality and the lowest weight births in the city and has high rates of ill health generally.

Educational attainment in the area is low. The average of the local primary schools, for those attaining level 4 at English (57%) and Maths (52%) at key stage 2 is lower than both the city (69% English, 66% Maths) and far below the national averages (75% English, 72% Maths). In The Valley 17% of the pupils at the local secondary school gained 5 GCSEs grades A\*- C compared with 41% in Sheffield and 49% in England (All figures are for 2000).

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<sup>3</sup> 60 out of 8,414 wards in Britain, where 1 is the most deprived. The Index is compiled using a composite of various indicators.

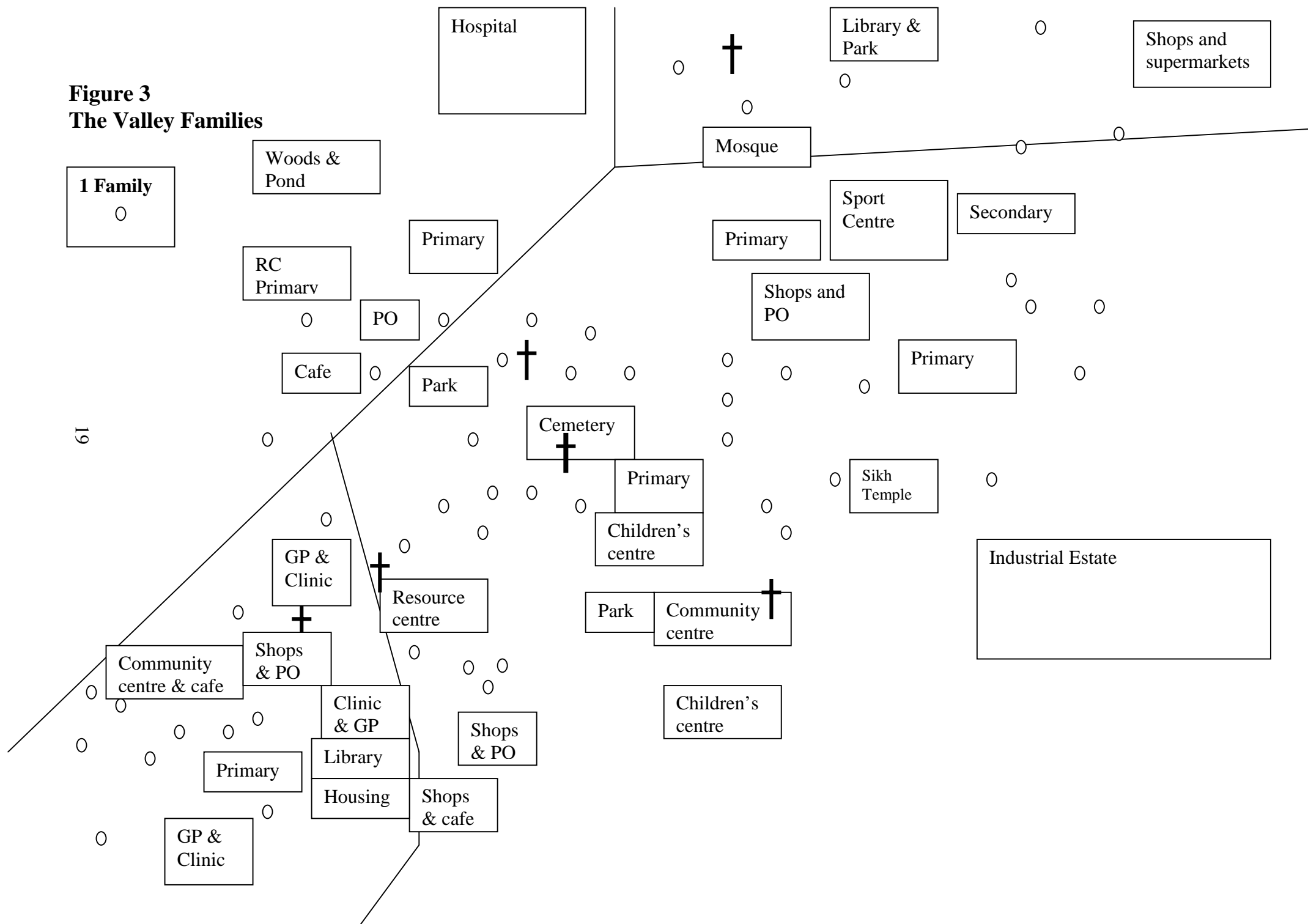
## Chart 2: The Valley

Housing and population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inner city area two miles (average) from the city centre</li> <li>• Population about 21,000</li> <li>• Local authority flats and maisonettes in purpose built blocks, housing association estates and privately owned houses</li> <li>• Diverse ethnic minority groups</li> </ul>
Transport
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buses into City centre run every 10 minutes – journey time 10 minutes</li> <li>• Buses to large shopping facility every 15 minutes – journey time 10-15 minutes</li> </ul>
Schools in the area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 mixed secondary school</li> <li>• 6 primary and nursery schools, one of which is voluntary aided Roman Catholic</li> </ul>
Shops and businesses in the local area
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local industrial park</li> <li>• Three parades of shops with post offices</li> <li>• Isolated newsagents</li> <li>• Two cafés, one restaurant and a take away</li> <li>• Pubs, car hire company</li> <li>• No petrol station, no supermarket and no bank</li> <li>• Local Regeneration agency – training programmes and Intermediate Labour Market organisation</li> </ul>
Adult Education and Lifelong Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult education centre offering: English as a second or other language courses and childcare</li> </ul>
Local information facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library</li> <li>• Housing office</li> <li>• Citizen's advice bureau</li> </ul>
Community facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community centre offers drop in facilities and youth group activities</li> <li>• Youth centre</li> <li>• Community café (with launderette and second hand clothes shop) offers group facilities for young mothers, special group for disaffected youth and a Credit Union</li> <li>• Children's centre and Black Women's Resource Centre provide childcare</li> <li>• Local churches – mums and tots groups and drop-ins</li> <li>• Community Action group – very active in area</li> <li>• Local newspaper with a circulation of approximately 6500 per month</li> <li>• Community health worker</li> </ul>

Leisure Facilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports centre attached to secondary school</li> <li>• Adventure playground</li> <li>• Two maintained parks with children's play areas and some patches of green and small, isolated children's play areas in flats</li> </ul>
Regeneration and Funding
Health Action Zone, Education Action Zone, New Deal for Communities, Sure Start, Single Regeneration Budget, Excellence in Cities

Figure 3 shows how families are spread across The Valley.

**Figure 3**  
**The Valley Families**





## 1.4 People's views of the areas

We wanted to find out how people felt about their neighbourhoods and how living where they did affected their daily lives. People had some strong views on where they lived and how it felt to bring up a family in their area. We use people's own words to describe each area under some main headings. There are strong contrasts between positive and negative views; sometimes people held both simultaneously.

### Kirkside East

Positive place, friendly and supportive with facilities

*Quiet. Where I am the neighbours are nice. We tend to watch out for each other. The shopping centre is close by but we'll have to see what that brings because it might attract kids.*

*It's ideal for job prospects – especially for me. I'm applying for jobs at the city council at the moment – we're just going through the selection process. There's a lot more opportunities for training than where we used to live. The council are good here, they let you know what's going on and chuck it down your throat.*

*Tidy, the roads and the streets are fairly quiet down this end.*

*It's certainly friendly – Busy.*

Secure

*I tell everyone to move into this area because you're safe. You won't get broken into, there's always someone round you (immediately local area). My mate's daughter lives in Scarborough and she asked what it's like - as long as you know people you're safe. We've never been burgled.*

Some things are good in spite of problems

*It depends on your perception. Some people think it's disgusting and some don't. But to be honest when I was younger I would never have envisioned myself living in Kirkside East. But where we are we don't class it as Kirkside East. We've no-one opposite and the woods behind. We could live in a neighbouring area and have neighbours from hell.*

*I would say crime, poverty and a lot of both but I don't think it's a bad area – I don't. If you don't get involved in the criminal aspects. I think it's becoming more parent orientated with facilities for parents and children.*

*A mess. It could be made better but it's also friendly.*

*Home. Huge frustration. I suppose it's friendly.*

*It'll do. The people who live here have a different image from those who don't*

Some bits good, some bits bad

*The bit where I live is alright. The top of our road is the quiet end. I wouldn't advise anybody to move into the middle of Kirkside East*

*Good and bad points. There's nice areas and not nice areas. It's Dodge City down the back.*

*It's funny we were talking to people in another area and they asked what it was like and my husband said – Beirut. It's not very good. I think it all depends where you are – here's nice-ish, the further up you go the nicer it gets.*

*This bit down here is a slum. My bit is a really nice place. They're like two different worlds*

*It could be better. I know they are trying. They've been putting fences round people's houses. I quite like it here but I think certain bits they could do things with. The walk through at the back is a disgrace, but they should complain – people have to be prepared to do it.*

*I always say I'm from the top end of the Avenue – there is a big difference between North and South*

*It's a mixed bag. There's decent people who are brought down by the not so good. And it's the not so good who are on the news and that's a shame because there are some really good, hard working people who don't get a mention and hopefully it will keep regenerating like that supermarket and that's just the start of it and it will filter through and bring more business in.*

*Reasonable in the day time – you don't get a lot of trouble in the day. It's the night time that gets you worrying. The noise and the groups of boys and girls standing around at night.*

### Social problems

*It's going to take a lot of money to get it up to a reasonable standard. It's not the council's fault. I think it's other people. If I clean up the dog mess I think everybody else should and not dropping litter. Everything in general. It's alright putting money into things but people have to do it as well.*

*A joyrider's paradise. They moved those families off another estate to here.*

*Most of my family call this side Beirut. They live in Kirkside East and I've lived here for 11 years and they've seen the change. It's a drug haven. It's a dumping site for burnt out cars round the back here.*

*The part we live in is getting run down. There's higher crime and it's less community oriented. Even though there's a neighbourhood watch scheme it hasn't got any clout about it at all. The bloke who runs it lives six doors away and I never see him. When it started he was round all the time but when I started giving him all the complaints he stopped coming.*

*Needs improvements*

### Run down

*Shit, Scruffy, Noisy with the cars (joyriders).*

*Can I swear? – It's disgusting, it's unsafe.*

*Crap basically.*

Views of Kirkside East fell into three main groups, positive, negative and mixed. One striking view was the gap between different parts of the estate. The other was that not much was changing overall, while some bits improved, others got worse.

### The Valley

#### A diverse area

*Mixed area – lots of mixed races, it's perfect for me. My family's partly black.*

*Individuals coming in are not seen as strange. In this little estate it's totally different – whites, blacks, Somalis, Asians. We understand each others' race and there's communication.*

*Handy - Multicultural*

*Multicultural, Down to earth, Community*

*Cosmopolitan, Friendly, Sense of community, Quite open – it's not small – there are different bits.*

### Really nice

*It's a really nice area. I think if people knew what it was like and didn't have their own racism they'd move here because the houses are cheap and big.*

### Improving

*Grim but looking up. A lot of it's so grey and concrete and everyone just has little yards. But I do think things are improving because of the money coming into the area and with training courses to get people back into work.  
At the moment it's a bit oppressed but it'll pick up soon. Most of the people in the area are friendly.*

### Good bits and bad bits

*There are good sides and bad sides. The Valley East I don't mind but I'm not keen on The Valley West. They just don't care. There's vandalism and the properties are derelict. But if you know people down there then they leave you alone.  
You could say – Loud, colourful and full of action OR you could say quiet, desolate and peaceful it depends.*

### Not enough being done

*We don't get a medical centre round here and the Health Visitors round here aren't organized.  
Alright – but could be improved a lot. Not a lot of checking up on kids who aren't at school round here.  
Needs few more facilities for children of all ages. There's nothing for them to do.  
Very untidy. I think we need something for kids to do like a youth club because there's nothing for kids to do really.*

### Social problems

*Friendly, help each other out but there's also lots of burglaries, lots of drugs and muggings there's nowhere safe – they used to have park patrols.  
Friendly to a certain extent. The North of The Valley is quite friendly. Drugs – it would be nice if the badness left.  
It's a bad area. I would never want to live there. But in The Valley there are people trying to make a change. They are trying and there are some positive things. But it's a bad area and the statistics for unemployment and drugs in that area are disgusting and then you get high poverty.  
Rough. I don't like the children, the way they're being brought up, playing in the streets past midnight. The language.  
Oh god. With your neighbours - there's no community spirit.  
Terrible.*

### Unsafe

*Good place to live but dangerous, drugs and areas I wouldn't go at night and if it was day I'd take somebody with me - although I haven't had any incidents myself.  
Quiet, Plenty of shops, The park, Drugs problems, The people at night – it's unsafe.  
This area – Quiet - The Valley is a bit rough.  
First thing I heard when I got up to the school this term was that someone had been strangled. I don't go down the Southern entrance to The Valley because of all those boys down there hanging around and I don't like going down, you hear about someone getting knifed or shootings.*

*Stay out – I wouldn't advise anyone to live here – I wouldn't now. You know kids of 12 and 13 and kids of 20 and 30 pushing things on them. The older people make the young ones grow up too quickly and it's disgusting.  
A phase in my life. For my children it's their childhood memories and I feel a bit sad about that. Theirs are going to be 'don't go there, don't do that'.*

The Valley is an area of extremes. Some people value it greatly while others feel desperate to get out. The area clearly has potential but is physically decayed in many parts.

## Housing

The tenure pattern is sharply different in the two areas and among the families. Kirkside East is a large council estate and the vast majority of our families rent from the local authority or live in council built, but now privately owned, properties on the estate. Only one family is renting privately. Of the 13 families who own privately, nine have bought their properties under the right to buy scheme and three have bought from an earlier right to buy owner.

In The Valley one fifth of our families are renting from a housing association (22%), more than shown in the 1991 Census (6%). This reflects the increase in availability of this tenure in the area. Seventeen families own privately but none has bought under the right to buy scheme, nor do they own ex council properties. One family in The Valley is part of a housing co-operative and seven rent from a private landlord.

**Table 4: Families' Housing Tenure (number of families)**

	<b>Kirkside East families</b>	<b>The Valley families</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Local authority	35	15	50
Housing association	1	11	12
Private landlord	1	7	8
Owner occupier	13	17	30
Total	50 families	50 families	100

All of the Kirkside East families live in semi-detached or terraced family houses, which reflects the type of housing in the area and the fact that the local authority lettings procedure attempts to place families in houses rather than flats.

The housing style in The Valley is much more diverse and our families live in a variety of dwellings including maisonettes, although this number has decreased significantly since the 1991 census due to demolition. The majority of the families in The Valley also live in semi-detached or terraced houses, some of them large Victorian properties.

**Table 5: Families' Housing Type (number of families)**

	<b>Kirkside East families</b>	<b>The Valley families</b>	<b>Total %</b>
House – semi	43	23	66
House – terraced	7	18	25
Maisonette – purpose built	0	9	9
Total	50 families	50 families	100

## Ethnicity

I have obtained the ethnicity data on school populations from the local education departments for January 2000 in order to reflect as closely as possible the current population composition, which has changed since 1991. These figures are for six primary schools in each area. The Kirkside East schools had 1857 pupils on roll and The Valley schools had 1554 pupils on roll. We decided not to use the figures for the secondary school in each area because the Kirkside East school is a regional single sex school that has a large proportion of pupils from outside the area. I have used the numbers for the children who are 12 and under in our 50 families.

**Table 6: Per cent white school children populations**

	<b>Leeds primary school populations 2000</b>	<b>Kirkside East primary school populations 2000</b>	<b>Kirkside East children age 12 and under (from the 50 families)</b>	<b>Sheffield primary school populations 2000</b>	<b>The Valley primary school populations 2000</b>	<b>The Valley children age 12 and under (from the 50 families)</b>
% white children in six primary schools in each area	88	96 (99% 1991) <sup>a</sup>	94	87	31 (90% 1991, under 16s)	57

a. Under 16s as % of area population from 1991 Census.

The population of Kirkside East is overwhelmingly white – 96%. Only one interviewee was from an ethnic minority background and two of the families had mixed race children.

The proportion of children from ethnic minority backgrounds is larger in each area than the 1991 Census. In The Valley there is a seven-fold increase from 10% of under 16s from ethnic minority groups in 1991 to 69% of the primary school population in 2000. The percentage of children in our 50 families who were from ethnic minority groups was larger than the number of parents interviewed (shown in Table 3 - 32%). This reflects two things. Firstly, we interviewed a number of white parents with mixed race children, whom we class as from an ethnic minority background, and secondly, some of the families from ethnic minority groups were larger in size (see also Mumford, 2001, p37).

## Children

All of the families had children under 18, the majority (60% in each area) with 1 or 2 children. About 89% had 1 to 3 children, while 11% had four or more, compared with the city averages of 1.1% for Leeds and 1.4% for Sheffield and the national average of 1.4%.

**Table 7: Number of resident children age 18 and under in the 100 families**

<b>No of resident children 18 and under</b>	<b>Kirkside East families</b>	<b>The Valley families</b>	<b>Total %</b>
1-3	44	45	89
4-6	6	5	11
Total	50 families	50 families	100

More than three quarters of our families in both areas had children who were under age 11. In Kirkside East 35 of the families had under 5s compared with The Valley where 51 of the families had children under 5. This was possibly influenced by the fact that nine families were recruited via baby clinics in The Valley in contrast with five in Kirkside East. The following table shows the age distribution of the children. The 100 families have 231 children between them.

**Table 8a: Age of children in the families**

<b>Age of children</b>	<b>Number of children in Kirkside East</b>	<b>Number of children in the Valley</b>
Under 5	35	57
5 – 7	32	16
8 – 10	20	17
11 – 13	14	14
14 – 16	14	9
17-18	1	0
Total	116 children	115 children

The following table shows the number of families with children in each age band. In most age bands some families have more than one child within that band. Six families in Kirkside East and 18 in The Valley have more than one child under the age of five.

**Table 8b: Number of families with children of different ages**

<b>Age of children</b>	<b>Number of families in Kirkside East</b>	<b>Number of families in the Valley</b>
Under 5	29	39
5 – 7	29	15
8 – 10	19	13
11 – 13	13	11
14 – 16	13	9
17-18	1	0
Total	50 families	50 families

### Whether parents were single, cohabiting or married

Our parents were a mixture of single, cohabiting and married. Just over one third lived in a married couple. Another 20% lived with a partner. In both areas around 43% of the interviewees were not living in a couple. All the lone parents were women and most had young children under five. The figures for 'couple status' for the two areas are given in Table 9.

**Table 9: Married, cohabiting or not living in a couple – number of families**

	<b>Kirkside East</b>	<b>The Valley</b>
Married Couple	19	17
Unmarried Couple	10	11
Not living in couple <sup>a</sup>	21	22
Total	50 families	50 families

a. One of the interviewees was acting as joint guardian to her younger siblings and one mother was waiting for her husband to get a visa to enter the country.

### Income and benefits

We recorded net weekly household income, including all benefits, where possible. On 15 occasions this was either not known or not fully recorded for reasons of sensitivity in the interview situation. Table 10 indicates the spread of incomes across the families in the areas. We also looked at the receipt of benefits including housing benefit as an indicator of income levels amongst the families (see Table 12).

**Table 10: Families' weekly net household income including housing, child and all other benefits**

<b>£ per week</b>	<b>Number of families</b>		<b>% Total</b>
	<b>Kirkside East</b>	<b>The Valley</b>	
100 – 199	13	20	33
200 – 299	15	14	29
300 – 399	8	6	14
400 – 499	3	1	4
500+	2	3	5
Not recorded	9	6	15
Total	50 families	50 families	100

The largest single group of families, one third of the total, received between £100 and £200 net per week. None of these were married couples. Table 11 shows that the overwhelming majority of these families are lone parents. All low income families in this band are dependent on benefits. Almost all are not working and one mother had no income and no benefits.



**Table 11: Weekly household income of £100 - £200 net including all benefits (number of families)**

	Kirkside East		The Valley	
	Yes		Yes	
Benefits other than child benefit				
Couple status	Unmarried couple	Lone parents	Unmarried couple	Lone parents
One child	-	5	2	5
2 children	-	6	2	5
3 children	-	2	1 <sup>a</sup>	4
4 children	-	-		1
Total	0	13	5	15

a. A woman who described herself as living in an unmarried couple but who counted income separately.

This confirms wider studies showing that families living in a married couple are far less likely to be dependent on state benefits and in the lowest income band than lone parents. The December 2000 figure for 60% median income (often used as a threshold for measuring poverty trends) for a lone parent with two children aged 6 and 3, before housing costs, is £171 per week. Some of the families in the table above would appear to be living on incomes very close to, or below, this figure.

45% of adults from the families in Kirkside East and 51% in The Valley were not in work, studying or full time education. Over 60% of the families in both areas were in receipt of non-universal benefits. Four families in Kirkside East, and one family in The Valley, were in receipt of incapacity benefit or disability living allowance. The other families received a means tested benefit. The breakdown of these benefits is shown in Table 12. The percentages are very similar for the two areas.

**Table 12: Receipt of benefits (number of families)<sup>a</sup>**

	Kirkside East Families	The Valley Families	Total %
No benefits other than child benefit	18	17	35
Housing Benefit	22	28	50
Council Tax	24	28	52
Out of work benefits <sup>b</sup>	23 <sup>c</sup>	25 <sup>3</sup>	48
Working Families Tax Credit	9	6	15
No income at all	0	1	1
Education grant	0	1	1

a. These figures overlap and so do not add up to 100%.

b. Income support and jobseekers allowance

c. Including one family receiving disability allowance as well as another household member's employment income.

Four families received a carer's allowance, one for an elderly parent and three for disabled children.

Of the families in Kirkside East 18% received Working Families Tax Credit, which indicates low wages. All three lone parents who were working received Working Families Tax Credit and two of these were in the process of sorting out their Housing Benefit though both were encountering difficulties with this. 12% of the families in The Valley received Working Families Tax Credit and three of these were also in receipt of housing and council tax benefit, including a lone parent who was currently in between part time jobs. This means that 65% of families were on low incomes as defined by the benefits system. For those in low paid work (15%), the government's new work-oriented tax credit was adding to their real incomes.

## Work

In total there were 170 adults (aged eighteen years and over in the 100 families). I recorded the basic employment details for all adults in the household.

Overall only 43% of all adults were working. Of those who were working (including 16 year olds and over) 62% in Kirkside East and 78 % in The Valley were in full time occupations. Table 13 shows the number of people in each standard occupation for each area.

**Table 13: Workers' Standard Occupation Classification (number of workers)**

	Kirkside East	The Valley	Total (% of all workers)
Managers and administrators	-	3	4
Professional occupations	-	4	5
Associate professional and technical occupations	5	6	15
Craft and related occupations	8	7	20
Plant and machine operatives	6	3	12
Clerical and secretarial occupations	6	1	9
Personal and protective service occupations	7	4	15
Sales occupations	2	1	4
Other occupations	8	3	15
Total	42 workers	32 workers	100

Nearly a third were in manual jobs – the biggest single group; 28% were in service jobs, below the national average but there was a big mix of occupations in both areas. In The Valley there were seven managers and professionals whereas in Kirkside East there were none. This reflects the tenure split between a large council estate on the edge of the city and an old Victorian semi-detached and terraced housing area with some pockets of council housing. The housing in The Valley is attractive to professional people buying their first home.

Of the 42 workers in Kirkside East 23 were men and 19 were women. Two of the workers in Kirkside East were 16-17 year old boys. Of the 32 workers in The Valley 23 were men, 9 were women and none were 16-17 year olds. The figures for full time and part time work according to gender are given in Table 14. Overall more people, more women and more lone parents were in work in the families in Kirkside East than in The Valley. This reflects the stronger local economy of Leeds and some of the employment opportunities on the estate. In The Valley some of the families have incomes that allow one parent to stay at home looking after the children while the other works. Two of the parents in The Valley had been released from jobs in the service sector to study, one full time and one part time, and two were on maternity leave at the time of the interviews.

**Table 14: Full time and Part time work, and gender (number of workers)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Kirkside East Men</b>		<b>Kirkside East Women</b>		<b>The Valley Men</b>		<b>The Valley Women</b>	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Full time or part time								
Total	22	1	4	15	21	2	4	5

All of the workers in craft and related occupations in both areas were men working full time. All of the workers in clerical and secretarial occupations were women and the majority of these were working part time. The three men working in personal and protective service occupations were a caretaker, a care assistant and a security guard working full time, whereas all the women in this category worked in childcare related occupations, including crèche workers and classroom assistants. Two women had more than one part time job.

None of the lone parents were working full time. None of the lone parents in The Valley were working either full or part time. In Kirkside East only three lone parents were working part time. In sharp contrast the vast majority (38) were not working at all. Table 15 shows the number of lone parents in each area who were working linked to the number with children under and over 5 years old. (These figures do not include the sibling guardian or the mother waiting for her husband to get a visa.)

**Table 15: Number of lone parents, working and not working.**

<b>Whether working or not - Full or Part time</b>	<b>Number of lone parents working</b>	
	<b>Kirkside East</b>	<b>The Valley</b>
Not working	17	21
Working part time	3	0
Working Full time	0	0
Total	20	21

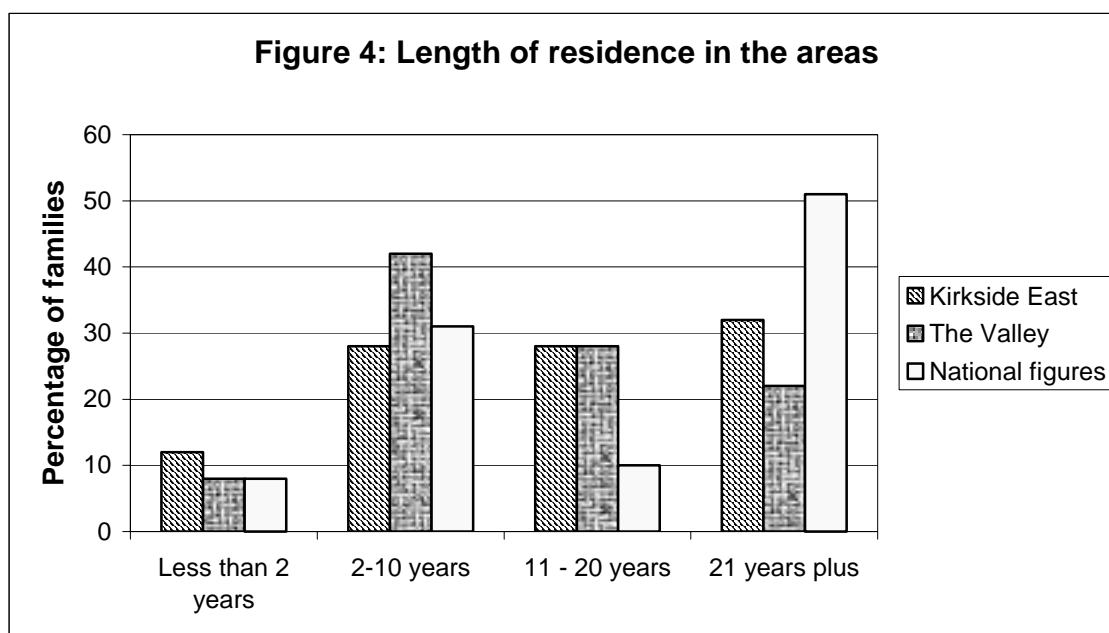
### **Length of residence in the neighbourhoods**

In Kirkside East 32% of the families we interviewed had lived in the area for 21 years or more and in The Valley 22% had. The national figure is 51%, based on Hedges and Clemens' study (1994).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This figure is for a total population of 3284 including families with dependent children.

Nearly half of the families had lived in the neighbourhoods for less than 10 years compared with 31% nationally (Hedges and Clemens 1994).

Figure 4 compares the length of residence in the two areas showing the contrast with national figures.



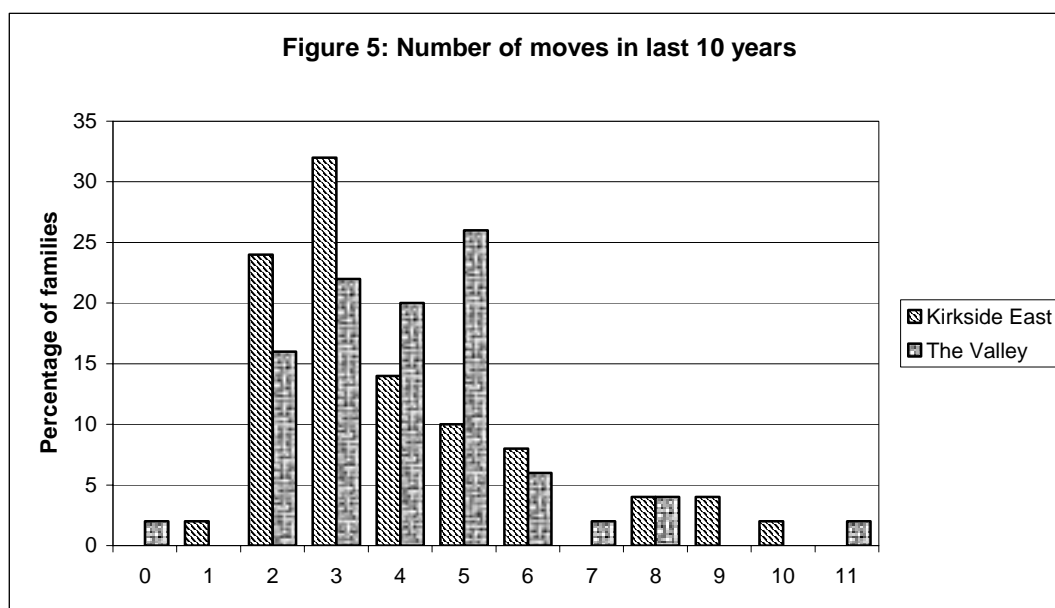
One reason for the families having lived much less time in the neighbourhoods than the national average is age. Most of our families have only primary school age children or younger. Therefore they are more likely to have moved to the area within the last 10 years. It is nonetheless true that these families are more mobile than average, in part reflecting their younger age.

### **Movement**

In The Valley over a third of the families interviewed had lived at their current address, as opposed to in the area, for less than two years. Just under a third of interviewees in Kirkside East had lived at their current address for less than two years and all of these were renting. In other words many families often move within the areas as well as staying for shorter periods in the areas before moving on.

26% of Kirkside East and 16% of The Valley families had moved once or twice in the last 10 years.

38% of families in Kirkside East and 40% in The Valley had moved 5 or more times. The vast majority had moved every 3 to 5 years, and many more often, whereas nationally households move on average every 7 years, making these neighbourhoods unstable in comparison.



A variety of reasons were given for so many moves. In Kirkside East some parents had moved following marriage, first into flats and then into houses when children were born. As families grew bigger they chose to buy or move to different parts of the area. Some moved back into the area after a move away. Some had been housed in Kirkside East following the breakdown of relationships or becoming homeless or pregnant.

In The Valley some interviewees had moved away from their family home elsewhere to go to college and onto other areas to work before moving to The Valley when they started to have children. Others had moved away from unhealthy relationships and in and out of hostel accommodation before finding housing or being moved into The Valley.

### Summary

Overall the 100 families reflect the make up of the two areas. There are more ethnic minority households in The Valley, more council tenants in Kirkside East, 65% of our interviewees receive state benefits and 43% of all the adults in the families were working. More of the interviewees are lone parents (43%) than nationally (24%) (General Household Survey for Britain 1998/99) and 75% of our parents have children under the age of 11. A high proportion of the families have lived in the areas for only a short time. Both areas are unpopular in the wider community generating vacancies that allow people to move around the areas or people who need a quick solution, often in desperation, to move in. This also helps to explain the higher than average moves around the areas.

## Part Two – How people see the areas

In this section of the report I present parents' views about different aspects of life in the areas. Parents talk about their worries about the areas and their desire to stay or move out, about bringing up children in the areas and how their own childhoods contrast with their children's. They also talked about community spirit in the areas, whether it existed and whether it mattered.

### 2.1 Satisfaction with the areas

I asked parents about whether they were satisfied with their accommodation, with the area as a place to live and as a place to bring up children. The first two questions mirrored questions used in the Survey of English Housing (1997/98). These questions were also asked in a survey carried out by MORI for the DETR which asked residents in seven areas receiving Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) money; the survey took place before regeneration started (Whitehead and Smith, 1998). The comparison between our families' responses and those in other surveys of low-income areas offer a statistical point of comparison for our more qualitative approach. Table 16 gives the results on satisfaction with accommodation and with the area as a place to live.

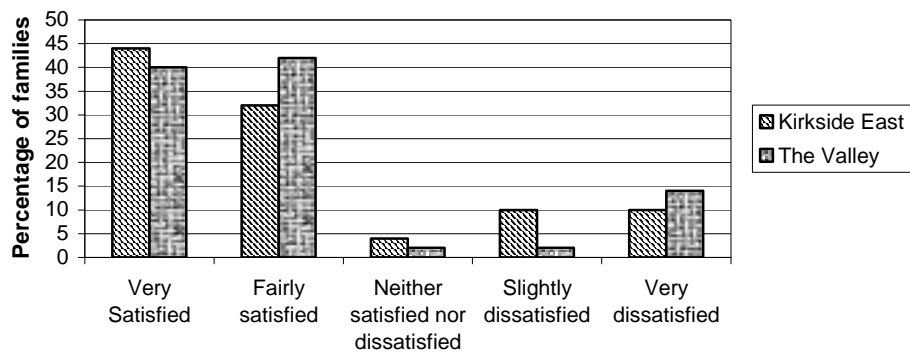
**Table 16: Satisfaction with accommodation and area as a place to live compared with national figures (%)**

	<b>Families in 7 SRB areas, before regeneration started (MORI survey for DETR)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Kirkside East %</b>	<b>The Valley %</b>	<b>England families Survey of English Housing 1997/98<sup>a</sup></b>
Very/fairly satisfied with accommodation %	70	76	84	87
Very/fairly satisfied with area %	64	68	80	83

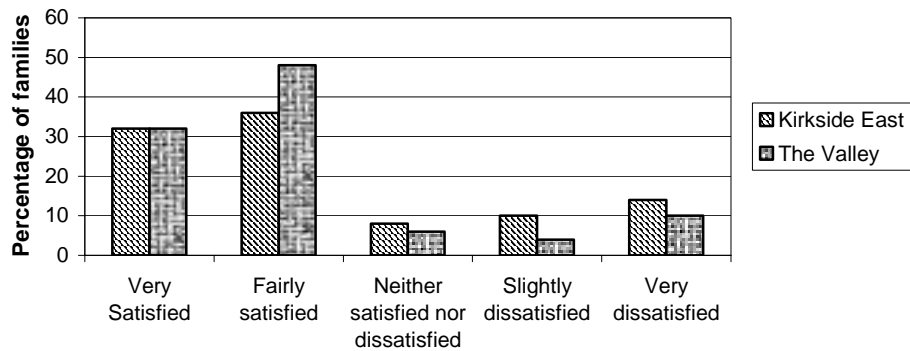
a. These figures are for households with dependent children – to be comparable with our data from the interviews.

More of the families we interviewed were very or fairly satisfied with their accommodation and the area as a place to live than those in the SRB areas, but they were less satisfied than the national figures. Satisfaction with the areas reduced significantly when parents talked about what it was like to bring up children in Kirkside East and The Valley. Figure 6 shows levels of satisfaction for both areas comparing satisfaction with accommodation and the areas with how the families feel about the areas as places to bring up children. While 80% were very or fairly satisfied with their home and 74% with the area, only 58% were very or fairly satisfied with bringing up their children there. Clearly these are not easy places for families to live in. The proportion of those who were very satisfied with bringing up children in the areas (21%), was half the proportion who were very satisfied with their homes (42%).

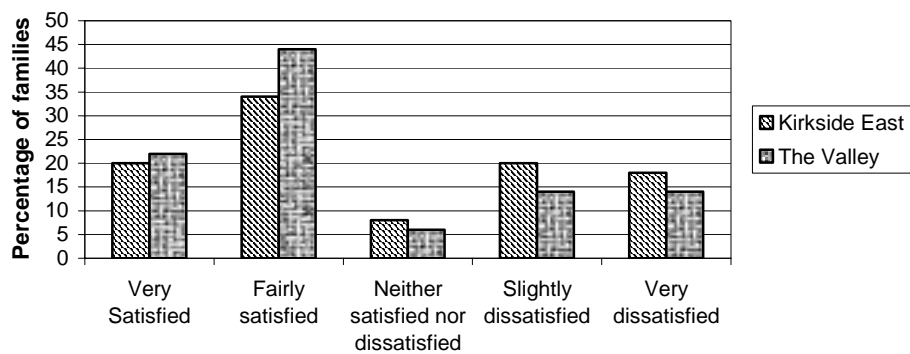
**Figure 6a: Satisfaction with accommodation**



**Figure 6b: Satisfaction with the area as a place to live**



**Figure 6c: Satisfaction with the area to bring up children**



## Housing

Three key issues emerges from parents' views about their homes

- Personal investment and control
- The Council as landlord
- Living in areas of low demand.

### Personal investment and control

Some parents had invested a lot in their properties. In both areas those who are very satisfied with their accommodation simply 'love' their houses. One woman describes her accommodation as '*the best house I've ever lived in*' and another points out that '*otherwise we wouldn't have bought it*'.

In The Valley those who are very satisfied link this to the type of houses they live in and the amount of investment they have put into their houses in time, money and effort. The issue of investment is linked to feelings of control.

*There are always things we could do but yes [we're] very satisfied - we've got control.*

This is more often the case with those who were owner-occupiers in both areas. Although some tenants are also investing in their homes they often feel they have too little control and cannot get things done. For them it is not worth making such a personal investment because the property is not theirs. This creates a vicious circle as they are thus unable to make their home how they want it to be.

*They're what you make of them, the rooms aren't right big. I've just decorated in here. I could knock through but they won't let me.*

But tenants are often attached to their homes in spite of the limitations. When asked if she would like to move out of her accommodation this interviewee said,

*I've already said I'm not moving until all the wallpaper peels off the walls.*

There is a clear gap in the amount of control between those who rent and those who are buying their houses. Tenants are more inclined to be dissatisfied although they also adjust their expectations according to their situation. Often lack of money affects this.

*It's fine, the space is ok. I've made the best of what I've got. I can't really complain. I would if I was rich but I'm not.*

### The council as landlord

Living in council owned properties is the most commonly identified source of problems for those who are not satisfied with their accommodation in both areas. Being on a large estate, as families in Kirkside East are, has a major impact on people's lives. They are very dependent on the Council as a landlord and on wider Council services such as street cleaning. Even those who say they are fairly satisfied face major problems.

In Kirkside East, the majority of those who are fairly satisfied and slightly dissatisfied complain about the state of disrepair of their houses generally and in particular the problems



of waiting for the council to do things. They identify many aspects of the council's work as problematic such as disrepair, rubbish and low standards of maintenance.

Interviewees feel that the council does not prepare houses properly before someone moves in – particular gardens are uneven and dangerous for children because of buried rubble. For example this parent does not allow her children to play in the garden because it is full of compacted debris.

*I don't have any problems with the street but the house is in some disrepair. I'm very unhappy with the garden. Because it's a huge beautiful garden that's unsafe...there are lots of things buried in it.*

As I entered several houses residents asked me to excuse the condition of the house and one woman specifically asked to be interviewed outside the home because her house 'smelt of damp'. Interviewees lament the fact that the council does not recognise their problems with the property and one couple identified this as one of the things that would most help their family at the moment.

*Getting the council to agree to do the windows and [do something] about the damp – but they say it's not damp it's condensation. The vent's blocked up but they've not done anything about it.*

Several interviewees describe how 'It takes the council a long time to come out and do repairs'. Some families have resorted to paying for things to be done themselves rather than waiting for the council to do them – in one case this included fitting central heating.

Some tenants warned me, as I left or arrived, to avoid holes both inside in floors and walls and outside on the path. One couple complained that some work had been started but not finished.

*It needs decorating, the council knocked a hole in the wall but haven't been back to sort it out.*

The majority of houses in Kirkside East appear to be good-sized family homes. 'It's a really big house...the bedrooms are massive.' Several interviewees talk positively about the modernization of properties when it has been done. But some still had unmodernised homes, without central heating and one of the interviewees had no indoor toilet.

*The house is ok but it gets very cold in the winter there's only a gas fire in the lounge (no other heating in the house at all) and I spend more on that than my Dad does on central heating.*

In The Valley one woman, who is fairly satisfied, reflects a more widespread unhappiness with living in a maisonette, and not a house.

*I'm happy with the garden but I'm not happy with it being a maisonette. We have heard that they're going to turn them into houses. They'll move us out and then move us back.*

In The Valley most of the interviewees who had problems with their council owned properties lived in unpopular maisonettes, in purpose built blocks that are half empty. These

interviewees have many problems with their home and their block, from disrepair and lack of space to isolation and poor or negative community dynamics.

### **Living in areas of low-demand**

In both of the areas there is relatively low demand for Council housing, which means that several houses are empty in Kirkside East and some blocks of maisonettes in The Valley are at least half empty. For several of the interviewees in The Valley living in council owned maisonettes was a source of insecurity. This sometimes reflected the fact that repairs were not being done creating speculation about the future of their homes. Interviewees mentioned rumours of demolition and conversion to houses but were not sure what to believe. People were often unclear about plans. The council has tried both demolition and conversion with other blocks of maisonettes in the area.

*Besides the other properties being empty and smashed up – the external window frames don't fit and the ceiling leaks. I've given up trying to get repairs done – the toilet seat doesn't fit - they're not spending money on these properties. I've tried and tried but they still expect me to pay full rent.*

Those who were very dissatisfied mentioned the impact of empty properties on their sense of isolation.

*It's terrible. In here for example there's 3 (occupied out of 14) on the block; my partner's mum, us and a couple downstairs. The rest are empty. There are 7 in the block opposite (out of 14). The council's not interested at all. You can go days without seeing anybody. There's nowhere for kids to play.*

She felt cut off as a result, 'You need someone to talk to'.

The only mother who lived in a maisonette and was very satisfied said it was because of the people in her block.

*I like it here on this block it's quiet (only 1 empty out of 8) It's like our own little community.*

Overall, the lack of control, inability to get repairs done, feeling of neglect and decay increase people's anxiety and sense of insecurity about the area. This seems to relate more strongly to being a tenant than an owner. Wider studies would support this finding (Glennerster and Hills, 1998; Power and Mumford, 1999).

### **Moving home**

I asked people if they wanted to move home and why. I also asked whether they wanted to stay in, or move out of, the area. People in the seven SRB areas surveyed by the DETR were also asked these questions. Table 17 shows the figures for both areas and the SRB areas.

**Table 17: Families' desire to move (%)**

	<b>Kirkside East</b>	<b>The Valley</b>	<b>Families in 7 SRB areas</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	
Want to move	36	48	46
-Out of area	14	20	28
-In area	22	26	15
		2 Don't know	4 Don't know
Don't want to move	60	48	52
Don't know	2	4	2
Not recorded	2		
Total	50 families	50 families	

In Kirkside East just over a third, and in The Valley nearly half the families wanted to move. In both areas about a quarter of all prospective movers wanted to stay within the area ideally. A much smaller percentage in the SRB areas surveyed by MORI wanted to stay within the areas and a higher percentage wanted to move away. Of all prospective movers 40% wanted to move away all together whereas 57% would be happy to move within the area.

Many people wanted to move because of a combination of problems. Most of these were concerned with their property or the immediate area and for two families these were also mixed up with bereavements and '*too many memories*'.

Several interviewees in Kirkside East described sharp divisions in their household between wanting to move out and wanting to stay in the area. One interviewee discussed this in response to the question 'Ideally would you want to move out of the area or to different accommodation in the area?'

*Personally to different accommodation in the area but my wife wants to get out completely, which I'd go along with but I'm not too keen on.*

*I - why?*

*I like being close to things and not too much change.*

Another mentioned this in response to the question 'how satisfied are you with the area as a place to live?'

*I like it and he hates it. He wants to move but I won't move. He wants to buy a house somewhere else but I won't move.*

In these families one partner had definite links with community groups and other people in the area. These were more inclined to stay in the area.

### **Property related problems**

In both areas those who were very dissatisfied with their accommodation had properties in disrepair or weren't in the right size house. All of these families ideally wanted to move to better properties within their area.

*It's disgusting. Five of us in a two-bedroom house. They won't move us. There's a massive crack from the roof to the floor - it's damp. I've been told it's not structurally sound. (Kirkside East)*

There were a variety of reasons for wanting to stay in the area including children's schools, work and financial constraints.

*At least once a day I think I've got to move out of this maisonette but I'm stuck because of my finances. It would be useful to be nearer the university but...changing schools [puts me off]. And I couldn't afford the rent anywhere else. But cheap rent shouldn't mean cheap treatment. I've tried to move through the council but they just offer me the same – a maisonette. It's derelict. (The Valley)*

Most people who wanted to move because of the state of their house were council tenants who generally felt they lacked control over their home.

*You need money – I haven't got the money to move. Like with the rent – it would be nice to own it. I feel no matter how much I do to it it's still not mine. (The Valley)*

Some of those who wanted to move out of their houses for property reasons related this to lack of space. In one family's case this was because they needed more land for their gardening business.

### **Area related problems**

Five of the families interviewed said that they had an active transfer request in with the council at the time of the interview. Two further families said that they would like to transfer but that the council wouldn't consider them because one owed arrears and one was paying off a social fund grant.

About 20 people wanted to move for neighbourhood reasons and on the whole similar reasons were given in both areas.

For those who wanted to move but stay nearby there were three particular reasons for wanting to move; overriding problems with their own property, neighbours and the state of nearby property. Sometimes all three were mentioned. These interviewees did not want to move out of the area and one wanted to stay on the same street. One interviewee was about to move round the corner.

Several interviewees were worried about their very immediate neighbourhood. Their concerns included litter, car theft and joyriding, the state of the park, lack of facilities for children and problems with neighbours and the 'street'.

*Yes. We need a larger house. I have got another house, I'm just waiting for the key. Next door – when the flat was empty – they used to dump the rubbish there. You ring environmental health and they don't want to know. They have done nothing. No sooner do I pick it up than it all comes back. I wanted to move down to a cul de sac near (a local community centre) where my sister is, to help with (my daughter's) asthma. It's fairly popular though and they wouldn't move me for 6 years. There's nothing particularly wrong with it- but the litter. (Kirkside East)*

In Kirkside East the main reason for moving within the area seemed to be the divide in the area between the north and south. The north has more privately owned properties than the south, is more affluent and less densely populated. One interviewee had asked to be housed in the south because it was easier to find an empty property, 'I knew I'd get a house here'.

*The woman in the housing office nearly fell over backwards when I put South Kirkside East as my priority. Not many, well nobody, chooses it.*

Some explained how they made it clear to people that they lived in the north and not the south in order not to be stereotyped. This division even showed up in the property values and attitudes to right to buy.

*...we might buy a house but in North Kirkside East. You can resell them better, but really it's no better than here.*

Interviewees said that they wanted to buy a house because renting 'is dead money', but they would only consider the more affluent part of the area because of the problems of re-selling. As the interviewee above said:

*But I wouldn't buy a house here because you wouldn't be able to sell it again.*

This was borne out by a local estate agent who said they tried to avoid taking properties on from the less popular area where they felt owners would be 'lucky to sell' for £15,000 – £25,000 (for 2 and 3 bed semi-detached properties) compared with the 'more desirable', northern part of the estate where similar properties were on the market and sold, although still with some difficulty, for £35,000 –£50,000 (September 2000).

In The Valley those who wanted to move elsewhere in the area also identified property issues such as space and local social problems such as drugs, children's and neighbours' behaviour and poor facilities. East, West, South and North mark out the different parts of the area.

*Not further down. Because it's [West of The Valley] and they put anybody down there and it's a mess. If they cleaned it up and put decent people in it would be alright – further down it's a right mess. They offered me one down there and I said no. There was a smell down there it's ridiculous. They should look at the people, you're not supposed to judge on looks but you can tell. I asked if we could do a swap with one in [The East of The Valley] and they said no. No matter where you are you get bad and good – I've seen kids dealing drugs but I told my lot I'm not having that. I said if I catch them I'd phone the police myself. I want them to go to school and learn to be somebody. They can see me struggle. As soon as she goes to school full time I'll go to college or find something.*

Those who wanted to move out of the areas but stay nearby expressed a sense of wanting to be off the estate where they lived, and to move to neighbouring areas, some of which were more affluent. The reasons for wanting to stay nearby were to do with family and children's links with the area including relatives, schools, friends and activities.

*So the children, they have lots of friends, so they are near enough to keep their friends. (Kirkside East)*

*But I'm near the college and near my auntie. If I had a car I'd be out. (Kirkside East)*

One of the families had recently bought under the Right to Buy Scheme but was keen to sell once it was legal to do so without financial loss. Her friend who was present at the interview said.

*We've always said if we could just pick up our houses and put them somewhere else.  
(Kirkside East)*

Those who wanted to move out of the area altogether felt that much broader problems, to do with the area as a whole, made them want to leave. These included crime, children's behaviour and 'druggies'. These destroyed what they otherwise thought of as a nice place. They identified area wide problems rather than housing problems.

*I do like the area but it's the kids. They're just cheeky and rude and in and out of your gardens. You just don't feel private. (The Valley)*

*The house isn't a problem, the 2 boys get on. It's not the house it's just the area. I've had 2 cars pinched and I can't tell you how many times they've tried to get in. My husband works really hard but yet we're not allowed nice things. (Kirkside East)*

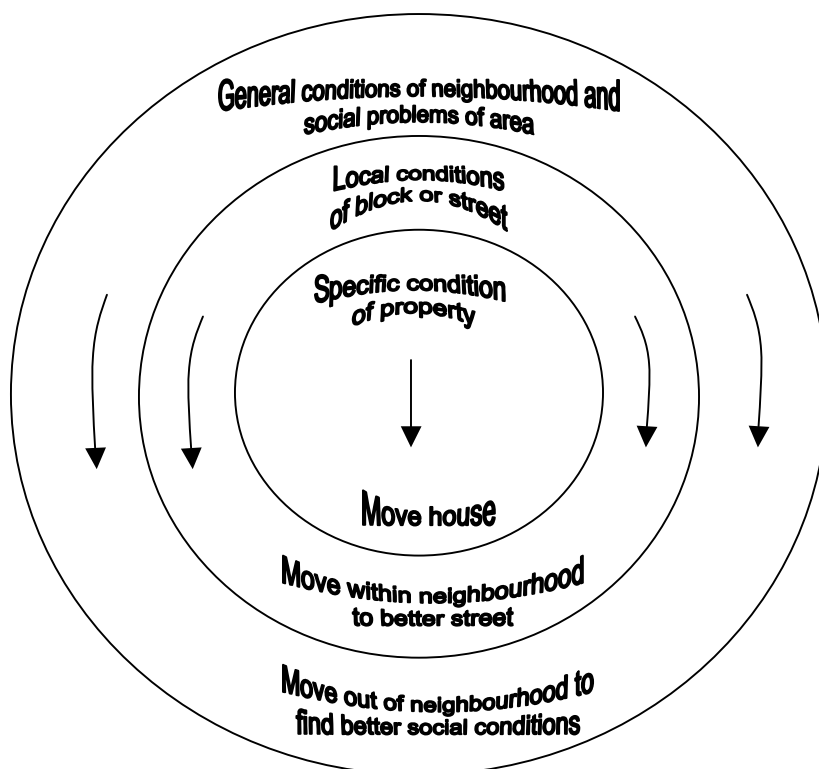
*Just here where we are it's nice and quiet but if you go 10 doors down it's horrible - full of druggies. It's a mess. If we'd have been offered a place to live down the road we wouldn't have taken it – and we were homeless at the time. (Kirkside East)*

All these parents sensed that they could not control the damaging events and behaviours that undermined their confidence in the area. Thus people's reasons for moving fall fairly clearly into four categories, working out from the home. The four dominant categories are:

- the condition of their property
- the fact that they are council tenants in unsatisfactory property
- the problems in their immediate block or street
- the area as a whole.

The issue of moving can be shown as circular layers of driving factors moving from a core of specific problems to a more general malaise.

**Figure 7: The four main categories of reasons for moving**



This diagram sums up the way people see their home and neighbourhood problems affecting them, often making them want to move. The people in the core circle have specific property problems that should be soluble. The next layer relates to very local conditions that people hope to escape by moving within the neighbourhood. The outer layer represents a more general deep-set malaise about the area and reflects a desire to escape. In all cases people wanting to move are aiming for a better chance for their children, and particularly a less threatening or less pressured immediate environment.

The repair, maintenance and modernisation of houses are real concerns for council tenants in both areas. It isn't just frustration with the physical conditions of their own home that affects tenants however. Tenants in The Valley feel insecure and unsure about the increasing deterioration of their properties. Might this lead to demolition or refurbishment, involving temporary or permanent relocation for the family? In round one of the interviews parents simply didn't know the answers to these questions. Empty housing in both areas makes tenants feel isolated, missing other households next door, along the street, or in the rest of the block.

Parents identify property and area issues as making them want to move. Tenants are more likely to want to move because of the state of their property, especially council tenants. Children, friends and finances often tie people into their neighbourhood. Bad relations with neighbours, local deterioration and a desire to move on often prompt people to move away from their immediate area. Unhappiness with the area as a whole drives people out, as long as they can afford to move.

## 2.2 Places to live

In both Kirkside East and The Valley feelings about the area are balanced between satisfaction and discontent. Some feel safe while others are afraid. Some feel both.

*It's shit. (The Valley)*

*It's brilliant. (The Valley)*

*Break ins, joyriders, Drug abuse. I send my children to a good school and they have a good education during the day, but I can't let them out at night. (Kirkside East)*

*Sometimes I hate it I really hate it, but it's comfortable and it's my home and I'm not going to let a few morons spoil the place where I live'. (Kirkside East).*

Both positive and negative feelings about the areas are very localised. Most interviewees feel that their particular street is alright, quiet, without crime and they have good relations with their neighbours. They are far less positive about other parts and other aspects of the area.

*This part is nice but going back to West of The Valley it's like Beirut – I got burgled there. (The Valley)*

*This bit's alright the middle bit's not too bad, it's the outskirts that are a bit dodgy. We've had no trouble except we had the shed broken into, but nothing really. (Kirkside East)*

People are aware that you have to keep away from trouble if you can.

*It varies on time to time. It's been better the last couple of months. It's alright to live here you just have to keep away from idiots. (Kirkside East)*

Some people talk about the area changing over time and others about their perception of it changing along with their own circumstances.

*I've been through phases of being less satisfied, more with the city than with the area. Since I've had children I've been quite happy. (The Valley)*

## 2.3 The areas as places to bring up children

Parents are much more worried about the areas as places to bring up children. Children influence parents' lives and ways of looking at things and this is reflected throughout the interviews. Parents struggle to overcome the problems of the area in different ways.

- **Home versus neighbourhood**

In both areas parents try to balance the negative influences of the area with positive influences from home.

*I think the place is how you make it. If you care about your kids and influence them I think the outside influences can be watered down. If you can instil in them a sense of right and wrong that goes some way. (Kirkside East)*

*It's ok – it's not as bad as people make it out to be. I teach my lot not to do the things other people are doing. It's all down to the parents. (The Valley)*



Most parents are worried by outside influences and by the number of uncontrollable problems and dangers outside their front doors. Parents struggle to achieve a balance between organising children's activities to protect them from the area and encouraging them to become 'streetwise' to deal with the area.

*Where we're positioned in the area I'm fairly satisfied because we've got a good balance. You can be educated but have no common sense. Now they're not deeply involved but they've got street sense. (The Valley)*

*It's the other families that they're bringing in. Mine are not street wise. I don't like them to be out on their own – I like them to be where I can see and hear them. (Kirkside East)*

*I wouldn't dare leave them running out on the street. I prefer them in the garden. People say you should let them run around and get street safe and they let 2 and 3 year olds run round but I don't think it's practical. (Kirkside East)*

- **Activities for children**

There were some positive comments about facilities for children from parents in both areas. This mother is actively involved in summer play schemes at a local centre.

*There's lots for kids to do. There are lots of community centres. You're not isolated. There are lots of play schemes and before and after school clubs. So you can work knowing the kids are being looked after. So there's affordable childcare. I wouldn't have been able to work and pay for a childminder. (Kirkside East)*

But for some families the facilities were simply inaccessible, unusable or just not there. Often this reflected the problems parents had in organising or affording outings; the dangers of letting children go out unsupervised; the lack of care, supervision or maintenance of open spaces; and the run down local environment. More isolated mothers feel more negative.

*There isn't really anything about. No playgrounds they've all been wrecked. There's no scouts or anything. (Kirkside East)*

*There's nothing for them to do they just get themselves into trouble which is not needed. (Kirkside East)*

One factor that may influence these very different views is distance from facilities and what happens within a very local area.

- **Safety**

Parents worry a great deal about their children's safety, especially because of poor supervision outside the home. Several parents mentioned that they didn't use the local parks in the areas because they were vandalized and there was no longer someone in charge.

*... I do know that what things there are, are vandalized and not replaced. The park keeper has been taken away. (The Valley)*

Parents see traffic and speeding cars as serious threats to children's safety especially as there seem to be so few safe play areas.

*I think it's very limited. It can be dangerous. Mine go to after school club. Other children play football on the road. Another child was killed and they are going to put speed bumps on the road but that's not really the answer. There's nothing in the sense of a park – [the main park] is too far and out the back is on a hill. (The Valley)*

Even around the home parents identified problems with the layout of the streets and neighbourhood. Several mentioned that living on a cul-de-sac offers protection, although some parents saw this as an invitation to speeding cars and a haven for drug dealers and burning out or dumping vehicles.

*We're careful with her – don't let her play out on her own because of the cars. They drive them too fast. I'd sooner keep an eye on her. (The Valley - cul-de-sac)*

*The shop over the road – the teenagers hang around there which isn't a problem but it's when the drug dealers come round here – it's a safe spot for them because it's a cul de sac. (The Valley)*

*It's alright with kids – being a cul-de-sac they don't run into the main road. (The Valley)*

Corner houses suffer particularly from vandalism and joyriders.

*We had nine windows smashed the other night. And with being on the corner the joyriders are terrible. (Kirkside East)*

Families in flats without balconies or gardens or with open space that feels unsafe often simply keep their children inside.

*I'd be happier if we had a verandah or something. I don't like hanging washing out downstairs because we've got thieving people downstairs. Just somewhere for them to play out. (The Valley)*

But many parents find it hard to keep their children in, despite the dangers, so they have to watch out for them more carefully.

*I've got a five year old I can't keep in and she wants to be with the older ones playing kerby (throwing ball against the kerb and catching it) and I have to be her eyes and ears. There used be parks but there aren't any more because the big kids demolish them. (Kirkside East)*

*Our way of dealing with it is that if it is late and dark I don't let the children go out or I go with them myself. The eldest has a mobile phone. As a community we don't go to nightclubs, only to friends' families houses – so we always have someone taking us and bringing us back. (The Valley)*

- **Drugs**

Drugs are a serious worry for parents in both areas. Parents feel that there are more drugs available and that drug taking is far more obvious than it was when they were young.

*I didn't know that much about drugs. The only drug place was [a local] pub and the only drug was weed. You didn't hear anything about coke or crack or brown. You didn't get them buying things so openly. It was more discretion and shame, now it's free and easy it's seen as just like smoking a cigarette. (The Valley)*

This has a knock on effect for children and the way they have to be educated. Some parents want to make their children aware of drugs at a young age to protect them from getting drawn in.

*We try to let them have a childhood like when we were kids but on the other hand you have to make them aware of everything. For instance when [my daughter] was only 3 she picked up a needle down the road and [my son] told her to put it straight down and brought her straight home. He's aware of that through school as well as us talking to him.  
(Kirkside East)*

The issues around drugs are slightly different in the two areas. In The Valley drugs appear to be established as part of the local economy. People in the area are aware of local dealing in crack houses and blues clubs. Parents see drug dealing and drug use take place around them and their children. Some have had to step in to protect their children from these activities.

*I did let him get a paper round but I went with him and he was scared of some flats and we walked down through them and there were junkies there.*

*Recently there've been a lot of drugs and they hide it round here. It's the youths. The woman next door is a Somali woman and she says 'they're coming in my garden and putting stuff in it.' My son found some crack cocaine in his friend's garden. They gave it to his friend's mum and she gave it to one of the youths out front.*

Mothers are all too aware of the drug activities going on around their houses. They have to be careful to protect their children not only from drugs but also from the possible repercussions of getting on the wrong side of those who are involved.

Although 32 people in Kirkside East mentioned drugs as a problem they mainly referred to a general reputation for drug abuse. But 8 mentioned needles specifically.

*Needles are streaming up the street.*

Parents know that abandoned syringes are dangerous for children especially as the local parks are often known locally as spaces that drug users occupy and litter. They therefore react strongly against open drug use and the visible debris it left.

In both areas there was a strong feeling that drugs tainted the reputation of the area, the local people and the schools. Many parents felt this stigma was unfair because 'drugs are everywhere' and not just in their area.

*All you get in the paper is drugs, burglaries and that puts a lot of people off. It's the same as everywhere else, there's no difference between us and everywhere else. (The Valley)*

*People think they [the people in Kirkside East] are druggies, and families that beat their children and troubled families. Yet here the man that got killed that was a drug baron lived at the top of our street [outside the area]. So because the area is mainly council I think people think 'oh well it's all over there and we don't have to deal with it', which isn't true. (Kirkside East – outside the area)*

Others simply fear for the future of their children when they are under such pressure.

- **Fears for the future**

As children got older parents explained how they worried about other children, the problems their own children cause in the area and their vulnerability in a troubled environment.

*I've just started to let my oldest play out – he's 9. The first night he got tied to a chair and had stones thrown at him. (Kirkside East)*

*For smaller children it's alright. For teenagers it's not very good for them. Where you've got control it's ok. (The Valley)*

*I love it here but every time the kids go out of the door there's that much trouble that they get into. It's the bigger kids – but I'm not saying mine are angels. The police knock at my door saying my kids are in trouble and I've had them grounded for 2 days. (The Valley)*

Parents were particularly worried about the problems of peer-pressure, as their children become teenagers. When asked about possible obstacles to her child's future, a mother of a young baby replied,

*The other kids on the estate. (Kirkside East)*

Other parents felt that living in these areas increased the likelihood of their children becoming involved in drugs and crime. When asked if they thought their children's future would be different if they lived in another area, these mothers replied.

*Yeah because there is a lot of [drugs and crime] round here. I've got to try to teach him not to get into it and teach him what they can do to your life if you get into them. (Kirkside East)*

*I know all children go through stages but you hear about it a lot more round here. (Kirkside East)*

*Where I grew up there was nothing to do as a teenager but lighting up a fag was about as bad as you could get. (The Valley)*

*If they stay in this area they'll struggle. No matter how you protect them you can't stop them from becoming involved. (The Valley)*

Some mothers of older children felt that their teenage children were able to make sensible decisions in the face of temptation.

*Well there's always people offering them drugs but I think they've got the sense to refuse it. (Kirkside East)*

Many parents felt that the possibility of getting in with 'bad company' would exist wherever they lived.

*You get a bad crowd anywhere. (The Valley)*

*Like with the joyriding they say it's getting into the wrong crowd but I think it's the child's strength to say 'No'. Because they can go down so many wrong roads can't they really, you just hope they don't. (Kirkside East)*

*It's hard to say really. You get these ideas about how things would be different if you lived somewhere else but who's to say what will happen to your children in the future. Whether you're here or in Millionaire's Row. (Kirkside East)*

*It's not to do with living here – it happens anywhere. Drugs are just as rife in rural areas as in inner cities. I just want them to be happy and achieve what they want to achieve. (The Valley)*

Underlying all the comments about drugs is a sense that many children are living very different lives from their parents and that they face more pressures and greater fear. Drugs represent a big issue and parents feel the need strongly to educate their children about the dangers.

## **2.4 Changing childhoods**

I asked parents how bringing their children up in Kirkside East and The Valley compared with where they grew up. Parents talked about their own memories of childhood and the changes they saw around them. They explained where they could and couldn't influence their children's experiences. They talked about things that were within their control, like restricting their children's freedom and overseeing activities. They also talked about things that were outside their control like the rise in drugs and crime and changes in attitudes. Parents talked about bringing up their children today compared with their own childhoods in relation to different social influences:

- Most immediately through parents and family
- Then the local community
- More widely within the area
- And finally in society more generally.

We look at each in turn.

### **Parents and family**

Parents' memories of their own childhoods are useful in helping us to understand how they feel about their children's experiences of growing up now and how they have tried to influence this.

Many parents felt that they had more freedom and were safer when they were children.

*We were allowed to go out and we weren't frightened to go out. (Kirkside East – grew up in the area)*

*We could ride our bikes all over and our parents never worried about us and we went on adventures. (The Valley – grew up outside the area)*

*Playing out is a different kind of playing out... You could go out on the streets and your mum wouldn't have to wonder where you are whereas now I always know where they are. (Kirkside East – grew up outside the area)*

Parents' happy memories included a belief that their own parents did not have to worry so much for their safety. Other parents including this grandmother suggested that this was not necessarily the case.

*Maybe as you get older you see more dangers. My mother says there were still things around when I was little - it's just more highlighted now. (Kirkside East grandmother-grew up outside the area)*

*It's perceptions of safety. (The Valley – grew up outside the area)*

Parents were often aware that their perceptions had changed as they got older and become parents themselves. What is clear is that parents felt that their children were in more danger and that it was their responsibility as parents to try to protect them.

*Just in the sense that it's not safe – we could ride off and play. But he can't do that. He's not allowed to play anywhere I can't see him, I know exactly where he is. (Kirkside East – grew up in the area)*

*I wouldn't let them out of the house. We used to roam around.. They go up to their Nana's, but that's over the road and I have to watch them go. (The Valley – grew up in the area)*

*There are a lot of safety issues now, which are good. Like I was babysitting at 10 but I wouldn't dream of letting mine look after babies like I used to. (The Valley – grew up outside the area)*

Most parents felt that their children had less freedom than they did. But they also felt that when they were children, they were more tightly disciplined.

*Now they do what they want to do. They were more strict with us. (The Valley – grew up inside the area)*

*When I was brought up my Mum and Dad were very strict and in schools they were very strict. It's not like that any more. (The Valley – grew up in the area)*

Children remained innocent for longer as a result, in the past.

*They learn to swear a bit earlier than we used to. I was 8 before I knew what swearing was. I had to be in the house at 8pm but you see them out at 10 pm and that's the little ones. (Kirkside East – grew up in the area)*

*Discipline – the way that kids are knowledgeable and street wise. I think the TV has a lot to answer for... (Kirkside East outside the area)*

Parents mentioned many wider factors that affected their ability to bring up their children as they wanted. The local community is the most immediate influence.

### **Community**

Several parents saw community, or the lack of it, as having an impact on their children's development. This mother goes on to explain,

*I lived in a residential area and the people were more community spirited. It's not like that round here. 10 years I've lived here and I'm just getting to the point where I can rely on someone up the street. 'We keep ourselves to ourselves' we were told from the offset. (Kirkside East – grew up outside the area)*

Some parents had memories of community involvement when they were young.

*We lived in a safe community – we could play out. I don't know about criminal activity but the streets were safe. It was a community. Everybody worked together to make things work. We had huge bonfires and street parties. I think everybody was equal. (Kirkside East Grew up outside the area)*

Parents' memories of their childhoods involved shared activities and a sense of being watched, increasing their sense of someone being in control and of safety.

*I was brought up in more of a community. It was a large council estate but there were pockets of community within that. Wherever we went we knew someone and we knew that if we did something it would get back. (Kirkside East – grew up outside the area)*

*There was more of a community when I was little. If you were cheeky you got a smack. (Kirkside East – grew up inside the area)*

*Well we lived in a street that had terraced houses and there was more community...and my auntie lived next door. I try to keep away from my family now. (The Valley – grew up outside the area)*

Such tight communities may have become more rare in part because people found them difficult to cope with at times. This mother was acutely aware of the constraints of living in a close community but nonetheless recognised the sense of unity and the security it created in her childhood.

*There's not as much of a togetherness. I was brought up in a terraced house and lots of little streets. I imagine my mum and dad would say it was a bit of a bind at the time and I prefer it like this as an adult, but then there was a sense of pulling together. (grew up in Kirkside East)*

*I think it was safer at that time. We lived over from the park but we'd get a bus on our own. Safety – but we have got a community, which is good for the children. It has got slacker but you still need a community. We were closer... when we first came over from Pakistan. (The Valley – grew up outside the area)*

In The Valley Pakistani families, in particular, talked about the importance of their community and their local organisations for their children now.

*I found [the city I grew up in] pretty fast...and everyone was widespread. They know more about Islam here than they did there. There are Asian youth clubs here. I've set up the project for young Asian women. We set it up ourselves. They send their daughters to it because they know us...It was totally different [where I grew up] you just got on with your life. (The Valley)*

### **Area**

We have already discussed the area as a whole and its impact on family life. When parents tried to compare where they grew up with where they now lived some described their childhood area in glowing terms, others more negatively. Some had had more facilities, others fewer.

*Things to do for the kids, there wasn't anything where I used to live, not a thing, no playschemes and stuff like there is now. (Kirkside East grew up outside the area).*

*Where we grew up it was smaller...It was a nicer area...plus there was plenty for children to do. (Kirkside East – grew up outside the area).*

But parents who were brought up in Kirkside East and The Valley have seen the areas change since they were growing up. They talked about the rise in drug use and crime and the general deterioration of the areas.

*We didn't see joyriding. Drugs has become a big issue on this Estate. There's more gangs going on than there were before in the local area. (Kirkside East)*

*There weren't houses that were boarded up, the cars weren't burnt out. (Kirkside East)*

One thing that came out very clearly was the tremendous difference to parents and to children that activities and maintained play areas can make.

*Everything was in the park – equipment – now it's just an open field. We used to play rounders. You don't see kids playing now. They put 'no ball games' signs up but they don't provide anywhere else to go. (Kirkside East grew up in the area)*

*They're always moaning that there's nothing to do. One good thing, a girl round the corner set up a scheme for 2 weeks at the end of the summer – 2 hours in a morning and 2 hours in an evening – they loved it. She must have worked for the council – I bought them some biscuits and squash. (Kirkside East Grew up in the area).*

Some parents had grown up in better off areas which were 'nicey, nicey' without the 'social problems' of Kirkside East and The Valley, but also with less 'tolerance' and 'diversity'.

*It was a much more privileged area where I grew up but at the time I didn't realise it. There was access to good schools and a lot more money in the area. But I wouldn't like to live there now and there are reasons why I'd like to stay here. (The Valley)*



*It would be worse where I grew up because it's an all white area because they don't see anybody who's mixed race. It's like time stood still. I wouldn't go back there. (Kirkside East mother of mixed race children)*

*There's a greater level of acceptance here and a wider spread of people with different aspirations. (The Valley)*

Parents often suspected that in these other areas a lot more was going on under the surface than met the eye.

*...It was quiet, not much vandalism. I only remember the fish and chip shop getting burgled, there wasn't much in the way of crime. They were all law abiding – well how do you know? – they were probably all gangsters! (Kirkside East)*

### **Influences from wider society**

Parents saw the strong influences within society that affected the way they brought up their children. Some problems reflect broader changes that affect everyone - 'society has changed'. Some changes are linked with increasing, or different, dangers and threats in society. For example children are less safe because of the general increase in the amount of traffic and people driving fast. Parents refer to 'hearing about things more' but not necessarily having direct personal experience of certain problems. Media coverage is perceived to influence this.

*Yeah because when we grew up you didn't hear about drugs. There was only glue sniffing and then not very much. You didn't hear about people going out and getting attacked and raped. Maybe it was around but you didn't hear about it. (Kirkside East)*

*I suppose the only difference is you hear more about the drugs element and strangers... (Kirkside East)*

*...like paedophiles - you didn't hear about that. (The Valley)*

Some parents linked wide changes in society to changes in general attitudes amongst adults and children. Attitudes to discipline, respect and money were all mentioned.

*It's a different way of life than when we were young. Kids are more cheeky and more grown up. Mine are more grown up than I was. I don't let them play out. My daughter watches the news and reads the paper. I didn't do that...but that's kids in general. (Kirkside East)*

*I don't think it's as much the area as society. There's discipline for starters. That's the biggest thing. There's things I wouldn't have dared do as a child that they do now. (Kirkside East)*

*And money wise things have gone dearer now and all the things they want – fashion things. (The Valley)*

Some parents grew up in very different societies, in other countries, and their memories of much simpler childhoods carried the mark of poverty and poor conditions.

*[In Pakistan] you don't have midwives coming to see you, you are just pregnant and nobody comes to see you... There when children start to walk it's barefoot, there we have no shoes. (The Valley)*

Parents' childhood memories and their experience of being a parent today suggest a complex picture. In the past it seems that on the whole children were freer in their play but more disciplined by their parents and the community. Now children are more restricted but more aware. Generally parents felt that children today are less disciplined and harder to control. Parents describe children in the areas as street wise, demanding and cheeky or rude.

*There are 7 year olds smoking and 3 year olds saying 'fuck off'. It's harder for them.*

The hundred families live in a society that they feel can be dangerous, in streets that are unsafe, surrounded by threats they cannot control. The areas they live in have particularly intense problems of poverty, crime and drugs. The communities that were once vigilant have dwindled and fractured and many now favour keeping 'themselves to themselves'. Local provision for children is inconsistent and not easily accessible to all children or all families. For all these reasons, while most people like their immediate neighbourhoods and think that conditions are improving, many do not think of where they live as an easy place to bring up children.

## 2.5 Does community spirit exist?

I asked people in both areas whether they thought there was a lot of community spirit and whether they thought it mattered.

Around half of the interviewees in both areas felt that there was a lot of community spirit, on a level with the national average.

**Table 18: Would you say there is a lot of community spirit in this area? %**

	Kirkside East	The Valley	Total families %	England families 1997/98% <sup>a</sup>
Yes	48	50	49	48
No	40	34	37	52
Can't Say	12	16	14	-
Total	50 families	50 families	100	

a. Survey of English Housing in respect of households with dependent children.

Respondents described how community spirit existed in particular places and amongst particular people. Table 19 identifies the groups and social organisations that parents associated with community spirit including the number of times people spontaneously mentioned each organisation or group. Some people mentioned several different groups, whilst others didn't mention any, although they felt community spirit existed in general.

**Table 19: Where community spirit exists**

<b>Social groups</b>	<b>Both areas</b>
Neighbours	34
Ethnic group	6
The elderly	4
Parents	1
Particular block	1
Tenants' Association	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Social centres</b>	
Community forum	6
Community centre	4
Children's centre	3
Church	2
Education facility	2
Parent and Toddler groups	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Special programmes</b>	
New Deal for Communities	3
A small closed group	3
Sure start	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Others</b>	
In the past	6

Neighbours were mentioned 34 times in both areas, far more than any other factor.

*As neighbours we do watch out for one another but locally I don't know. (Kirkside East)*

*Yes with the immediate neighbours but don't know further down the street. (The Valley)*

*Yes there is now. It's getting there. A lot of adults now are pulling together in our street. Where children are concerned the council is doing nothing. As a community on our street parents are stood out on the street with their children. (Kirkside East)*

In all, social groups were mentioned 47 times. People's comments underlined the very local sense of community, specifying a street, a few houses or a block. People were less sure of a sense of community beyond their immediate neighbours.

Community spirit was often linked only with particular local groups. In all social centres and organisations were mentioned 19 times. Certain local and ethnic groups shared a sense of community, which held those who belonged together.

*There is [a sense of community] at the [community] centre and that's the only place I know. (Kirkside East)*

*There is a lot of communication between parents. Amongst the Somalis there is a community. (The Valley)*

This made some people feel excluded. Some activities appealed to everyone but were only one off events. Other groups had people who attended some activities on a regular basis. But there were others in the area who tended not to get involved.

*People have got their own communities. Certain cliques. I'm not in a clique. I know the [community centre] people but I don't sit in here, but I talk to everyone equally. I don't like cliques because it puts people off and people could make more of an effort. It is a community in itself up at [the children's centre]. I'll drop [my son] off, go upstairs and then go home. It's just a meeting thing, a kind of checking in, but some people hang round most of the day. It's a meeting place. Certain things are for the whole community like jumble sales and activity days. Otherwise others don't join in. (Kirkside East)*

*In a way it would be nice if the community got together. But it's mostly the people from the Church who stick together (interviewee is not part of this). Apart from that nobody's interested. (The Valley)*

People often referred to the few who were active and the majority who didn't join in. A few people related community spirit directly to organisations and activities. These were particularly conspicuous in The Valley, where more community-based groups exist. These appealed to some but not others.

*The community meetings have a good atmosphere and there are people who are active but there's a massive number who aren't active at all. (The Valley)*

In Kirkside East in particular some people felt that community spirit existed in the past, but doesn't now.

*No. In this day and age people are very busy looking after themselves. I can't blame them. You have to look after yourself. Families are much smaller and don't live near extended families, they move to chase work etc. Maybe I'm biased because I'm not near mine. (Kirkside East)*

Therefore although nearly half the families believe that community spirit exists in their area, many are unsure or do not see it around them.

## **2.6 Does community spirit matter?**

In both areas many more interviewees – over three quarters - felt that community spirit mattered than felt that it existed a lot - half. A much higher proportion than the national average, thought that it mattered.

**Table 20: Does it matter to you whether there is any community spirit in the area? %**

	Kirkside East	The Valley	England families (1994) <sup>a</sup>
Yes	74	82	57 (46)
No	20	16	-
Can't Say	6	2	-
Total	50 families	50 families	

a. Hedges and Clemens (1994), all households. There was some variation by age. The 25-54 age bands were more concerned (60%) and this figure is probably most comparable to our own families.

Some parents did not think that community spirit existed in their area, or that it was in decline, but felt that it mattered. There were many reasons why people felt community spirit mattered.

Most people said that community spirit mattered because it made the area a nicer place to live.

*We moved in after everyone else and they made us feel welcome. (Kirkside East)*

*If there's no community spirit there's no community and that's important because if there's no community you get alienated and that's how racism starts and there's no racism here. (The Valley)*

Many people felt that community spirit helped them to feel less isolated.

*If not there'd be nothing there for you. There's a lot for me because I suffer from depression. If I needed someone to talk to there's someone round the corner instead of being stuck in the house. (Kirkside East)*

*It's good for well-being – to feel you're part of something and it pulls people together and benefits the area. (The Valley)*

In both areas people talked about the importance of looking out for each other and knowing who you can trust.

*I do think it's important because it's one way of knowing who you can trust and who's there for you. (Kirkside East)*

In The Valley parents talked about the community pulling together to get things done through community groups. People said that community activities helped to tackle common problems. The goal that people talked about most was making the area a better place to live. The current regeneration initiatives in the area were an important part of this.

*Yes. I think if people care about where they live it just feels like a better place to be. And if there are things that need to be addressed there are people who have the will to do things. (The Valley)*

*Yes because it redeems the area from being an area that is poor and has problems with drugs. It changes it to being an area with opportunities and that can change. Not just*

*because of the middle class but because it changes to an area with hope rather than hopelessness, so it is poor but not hopelessly poor. Grass roots communication is what makes the difference so it seems really positive to me that this is grass roots community action. A lot more than it often is. They are people who have lived here – they are residents. (The Valley)*

In both areas informal activities between neighbours offered concrete support.

*It's made a good difference to us. We've just had so much help with jobs round the house and information about the area. (The Valley)*

*It's nice to know that people do care about the community and each other. I'd like to think that if an elderly person in the area needed something they could come to me. The old lady next door used to but she's died now. (The Valley)*

People not only relied on support but also enjoyed giving it.

*To a certain extent I like to be involved. We had an anniversary party for an elderly woman. It was in the street and the whole street came and it made her day. (Kirkside East)*

In Kirkside East people talked about groups that tackled specific problems. These groups wax and wane so some valuable community links disappear prematurely, often to re-emerge later over a different issue.

*Like the group for parents with children with problem behaviours, which is great and it really helps. I've been in the position that the group dwindled and we tried to keep it going but it eventually closed. It's worrying that they are going to close down. (Kirkside East)*

Some parents were keen for community groups in the area to help children. In Kirkside East parents mentioned how much this can help children.

*Yes..I'd like there to be [community spirit], to get involved with things for [my son] as well – to make things happen for the kids. (Kirkside East)*

*Yes because I think it helps the children to communicate and develop socially. (Kirkside East)*

In both areas people identified particular crises or tragedies that brought people together.

*A few weeks ago there was a fire up the road and people helped. (Kirkside East)*

*Mind when the kid got hit by the police car ...by the police car – twice – the community got together and marched on the town hall. So there's a lot of community spirit if there's an incentive. (The Valley)*

People sensed that an underlying solidarity and support could be evoked. But they missed community activity when it disappeared because they actually lost the services, contact and direct help it offered.

Many more people felt that community spirit mattered than thought it existed in both areas. Neighbours were the most important factor in both areas, especially in offering concrete support with children and help in the house. In The Valley organised community activities were identified as tackling issues in, and across, the area. In Kirkside East the informal exchanges of friends in community centres and individual groups were mentioned in certain parts of the area.

People felt that community spirit helped to promote friendliness, trust and security and made the areas better places to live, where people could come together to fight problems and tackle issues. Overall the majority of families did think that community spirit mattered and they wanted to know they could rely on it in times of need.

## Part Three: Changing areas

In this section of the report I present parents' views about how the areas are changing. Parents talked about whether the areas were getting better and about local schools. Families in The Valley talked about the racial composition of, and race relations in, the area. Families in both areas also talked about what would help them most at the time of the interview.

### 3.1 Race

Kirkside East is an almost all white community and very few comments were made about race. A family with mixed race children was concerned about racist taunts and racial tensions in a local secondary school. We did not specifically ask about race relations but in The Valley it is a major issue, reflected in what families volunteered. In Round Two of the interviews we ask more direct questions about race. The quotes in this section are all taken from the 40 interviews in The Valley where race was mentioned.

The multicultural character of The Valley is felt to be strongly positive by many families from ethnic minority backgrounds and also for many white people. But some families see cultural differences as a cause of racism and divisions in the area.

Several parents specifically chose to live in the area because they didn't want their children to suffer from racism.

*Because [my son] is mixed race and getting racial harassment elsewhere. (White British mother with mixed race child)*

*I'd have to take a big risk living in an area with fewer ethnic minorities and having to change to their values. If we were in a professional area it would be tolerated but in a white (low income) estate you wouldn't be. (Pakistani father)*

Several white and mixed race interviewees said they moved to The Valley because they wanted their children to grow up amongst different cultures.

*I like the school and the racial mix. I come from a small village where I didn't meet any black people until I was 15. I want my children to be multicultural. (White British father)*

Some parents contrasted their own experiences of growing up with their children's.

*Where I was brought up was a very typical upper working class new housing estate. It was very twee with no ethnic people at all. It was very different. People kept themselves to themselves apart from your immediate neighbours. Nobody knew one another I don't think... [The local school is] multicultural which is great because my children are mixing with them from a very early age. (White British mother)*

Although inter-racial contact is seen as a positive aspect of the area for many parents, there are also those who feel that there are too many 'different cultures' who do not get on. Problems between children bring this to the fore.

*She went to [another local school] before and didn't like it. There was a lot of bullying with the different cultures. (White British mother of mixed race children)*



*A lot depends on who they move in. I'm not blaming black people – there wouldn't be any hassle without the kids. (White British mother of mixed race children)*

*[My son] got beaten up by a group of Jamaican kids and I couldn't contain myself. (White British mother of mixed race children)*

Many of the interviewees feel that the area is becoming a 'ghetto' and that this makes things worse.

*As a black child I don't remember 11 and 12 year olds being stopped in the street by the police just because they were on the street and black. (Black Caribbean mother)*

*They put too many black people together. (White British mother of mixed race children)*

White people from outside the area often stigmatise it further. It's identified as different because of the number of ethnic minority groups.

*It's got a very bad reputation. My Great Gran said 'oh crikey you need a passport to go there.' But it's not well deserved because in the 3 years I've been here I've not seen any major trouble. People who don't know it have an idea of it as a bad area. People who live here think it's alright. (White British mother)*

A few parents talked about the problem of resources for those from different ethnic minority backgrounds. Language is a big problem.

*For the first 3 – 5 years it was very difficult here. As soon as I came I was pregnant with the second child and I had to go alone everywhere with a letter in my hand saying where I wanted to go. I can read and write it's the speaking and understanding that's difficult. I had 2 or 3 cousins who were busy. Any appointment I had to go alone. (Pakistani mother)*

*There is no language support, there's no Albanian translation service. (White British Father)*

Children with English as a second or other language have an additional hurdle. Parents think this can lead to the wrong assessment of these children and that the pressure on the school as a whole affects everyone.

*What frustrates me is the education system. There are lots of children with English as a second language. It's not recognised that more support is needed. I think [my daughter] hasn't reached her full potential because of that. There are a lot of kids who are stigmatised who don't need to be, because it's a language issue. I'm not blaming the children, it's the system. [The school] do really try hard. They do teach all the children about all the cultures and respect - which is really important. (White British mother)*

Concentrating the most needy new groups in an area with high levels of unemployment, crime and drug use and low levels of educational attainment compounds the problem. Vulnerable newcomers experience these problems acutely.

*Because we have got ethnic minorities not everybody's needs are met, only certain groups' needs are being met. (Arabic mother)*

There was also some suggestion of increasing segregation in the area, especially in the primary schools. Two schools are predominantly Asian, another predominantly African Caribbean.

*I think [in] the schools - there's ghettoisation. [School A] and [School B] have problems. [School A] has Pakistani children. The Pakistanis choose to move here. They have a community and are quite stable. I'm concerned about the racial mix – [my daughter] is the only white child. She's really integrated but [my son] gravitates to white children and the playgroup is predominantly white, so school is going to be new to him. [In the class there's] 20-25 Pakistanis, 5/6 others and 4/5 white, which isn't multicultural - it's more like a Pakistani school. That's not positive for black kids and it's not positive for white kids. (White British Father)*

*It's a good community school [but there are] more of our people than white people. I like more of a balance because it needs to be mixed to alleviate prejudices. (Pakistani mother)*

This separation can exacerbate tensions and people are aware of big divides within the area between different groups.

*There is a big split between the Asian Muslim community and the white middle class women. (White British mother)*

One parent felt that this division could destroy community.

*No – I don't know – I don't think there is [any community spirit]. I think there's still a big split between cultures. (Indian mother)*

Some parents gave evidence of Estate Agents playing on racial fears.

*An estate agent told some friends not to buy in the area because it's full of blacks and drug dealers. (White British mother)*

But people also talked positively about the sense of community generated by cross-cultural contact.

*The children are honest and better at communicating, the multiculturalism adds to the community. Even if you keep yourself to yourself you can see the community spirit, you can see whites talking to blacks – it's beautiful. (Pakistani mother)*

The comments of 40 parents about race relations reveal very different attitudes. Only four were wholly negative, all white British, and the majority (24) had mixed views, feeling positive about the contact and the good relations but worrying about prejudice, friction and lack of resources. Twelve parents had a clearly positive perspective on race relations in the area but 8 of these worried about wider racial attitudes and the shortage of resources, particularly in the schools, to cope with language barriers and refugees' problems. There was also a worry about the concentration of refugees in the area.

Many different views about race come out of the interviews in The Valley. On the one hand parents feel more at ease because their children are accepted in the area and are being brought up in a mixed neighbourhood, where in other areas they might suffer from racism or be less racially aware. On the other hand parents are aware of problems between different groups in the area, especially conflict between children. Some parents link these tensions within the community to stereotyped images held by those inside and outside the area. Parents of different backgrounds and races are worried about similar things – ethnic tension, school segregation and high concentrations of disadvantage.

### **3.2 Schools**

Most parents had children at school. We asked for their views on the schools their children went to and why they chose those schools. Parents in both areas talked about local schools in similar terms: their own children were generally happy and they were satisfied with the school they went to; in spite of this the bad reputation of the area often led to the local schools acquiring a bad reputation. Parents were acutely aware of the poor reputation of some of the local schools but their own experience often ran counter to that.

The reputation of the school depended on who you were talking to, *‘good from those who use it, bad from those who don’t’*. In some cases the schools had a bad reputation because parents who did not send their children to them spoke about them negatively contributing to their bad name. Parents who wanted their children to go to the local Catholic schools liked the fact that they were smaller, with smaller classes, strict and had a uniform. All of these things contributed to their better reputation and higher demand for places.

Parents who were worried about local schools were often even more worried about sending their children out of the area, especially at primary age. Parents often commented that the schools were ‘trying’ and ‘improving’ and coping with problems.

#### **Local schools**

The most important source of information about schools for parents was the network of local information they got from friends, neighbours and relatives. Although a few did mention OFSTED reports and league tables these were not the most important factors in their decision.

*We looked into OFSTED as well but it was mainly from the people around. (Kirkside East)*

For both primary and secondary schools the most important factor for most parents was the proximity of the school to home, regardless of reputation and performance.

*There was a thing in the [local paper] a little while ago that published a table with [the junior school] fifth from the bottom in the country, and people said ‘oh god’. But at the end of the day I send my kids to the nearest. I’d like them to go to a nice school but it’s getting them there in the morning. (The Valley)*

For parents in both areas secondary school choice was more difficult than primary. In both areas the closest mixed secondary schools have many problems. In The Valley the closest

secondary school had been ‘fresh started’<sup>5</sup> in 1998 and a nearby school was due to be ‘fresh started’ in September 2000. Parents in The Valley were hopeful that there would be evidence of improvements in the school in the year following the interview (2000-2001).

*There’s room for improvement but they are trying hard. From the brink of disaster they are doing their best. (The Valley)*

Parents were already positive about the new headteacher.

*There’s a good head, he’s friendly.*

*It did have a reputation but it’s come on in leaps and bounds since the new head [arrived].*

But some parents, who could afford to, were thinking of moving house because of schooling problems.

*If you live in The Valley you have to think about [secondary schools]. Some days I think it will be fine, some days I think we should move otherwise they won’t get a shot. We’d have to move to the catchment area, which is essentially why people have moved out of the area - to guarantee places at [other schools]. Or it means travelling and not living with the children they’re at school with. But [the local secondary] had a lot of problems and it’s got a long way to go to catch up. (The Valley)*

Parents talked about their children’s needs, their happiness and their friendships; they worried about the possibility of them falling in with the ‘wrong crowd’ in secondary school and their hopes that they would move away from ‘bad influences’ from their primary school.

*Infants and Juniors are ok but they always have a problem going up to seniors. My oldest daughter’s got special needs and she used to get bullied and beaten up on the school mini bus. (The Valley)*

In the first year of secondary school the problems of travelling were a big issue along with the difficulties of maintaining a social life in the local area if their school friends lived elsewhere.

*I went to (a secondary school slightly out of area) and I didn’t enjoy that at all. But it is changing (being ‘Fresh started’ in 2000) with all new teachers. But I think [my son] should pick that himself – if he wants to go with his friends – but I’d like him to go there. (The Valley)*

Parents were torn between wanting the best education for their children, worrying for their children’s safety and happiness and fearing the pressures of local problems. In the end they were often swayed by prevailing local opinions, travel considerations, and at secondary level, the child’s choice of school.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Fresh start’ is a central government programme in which a school that is judged to be unsuccessful is closed down and a new school is opened in the same building but with a new name, new uniform, new head teacher and staff. This often attracts substantial media coverage.

## Experience of schools

The majority of parents who had children in primary and secondary schools were satisfied, or more than satisfied, with the schools each of their children attended. Table 21 gives the figures for both areas.

**Table 21: Satisfaction with schools in both areas (for all children at primary or secondary school) according to parents.**

Level of satisfaction	Children in each area in each satisfaction level according to parents		
	Kirkside East (no.)	The Valley (no.)	Total (%)
Very Satisfied	47	20	49
Fairly satisfied	15	27	31
Satisfied	4	4	6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	2	0	1
Slightly dissatisfied	6	1	5
Very dissatisfied	3	1	3
No opinion	1	0	1
Not applicable	2	3	4
Total	80 children at primary and secondary school	56 children at primary and secondary school	100%

There are a number of core aspects of schools that shape parents' feelings about schools.

The **location** of the school is key, especially for children in primary school and the first years of secondary schooling. Parents need to be able to get their children to school safely and pick them up easily, or be able to arrange for others to do so. Schools that are closer to the community also offer social and educational contacts for parents, with other parents, group activities, education classes and teacher support.

Where the school's **facilities** are good parents feel positive that their children will benefit. In The Valley the problem of not having a 6<sup>th</sup> form locally was particularly important to some parents. In both areas after school clubs and other activities were praised where they existed.

The **environment** of the school influences how parents feel about sending their children there and about going to the school themselves. Old, unsafe buildings, racial tensions and an unwelcoming atmosphere put people off, whereas new or refurbished buildings, positive cultural interaction and a welcoming atmosphere put parents at ease.

The **approach** of staff encourages parents' confidence and makes them feel that their children are being made welcome and encouraged. They like their children to be rewarded as well as punished. Parents are happier when their children are happy at school. The headteacher was often praised for making a school feel positive by being friendly. Parents felt let down when their child's needs went unaddressed and when they felt that staff had negative attitudes towards the children, especially those with special educational needs.

**Discipline** helps parents to feel that children's behaviour is being monitored. Parents worry about bullying especially when it seems to be ignored. They liked headteachers and staff to deal with problems and to know that clear boundaries are being set for children.

A working **home/school relationship** makes parents feel involved. Parents were alienated by poor communication with the school. They sometimes felt that they were being lied to rather than kept informed or consulted.

In the eyes of parents school life is often precariously balanced between success and failure as chart 3 shows.

**Chart 3: Parents' positive and negative experiences of primary and secondary schools in both areas**

Positive	Negative
Location and facilities	
Local - can get to and work with Before and after school clubs Good Facilities Outings	Not local – seems too far Not many after school activities Not keen on location of school No 6 <sup>th</sup> form
Environment	
Cultural mix Friendly/welcoming New building Uniform	Racial tension 'They make me feel small' Old buildings Weak uniform policy
Approach	
Committed teachers Good head Supports Special Needs Children are helped not left	Negative attitudes towards children Bad head Child's needs not recognised Child's needs not addressed
Discipline and behaviour	
Children happy/doing well Strict Deals with bullying Merit and bonus scheme Well structured behaviour policy	Children not happy/not doing well Lack of discipline Bullying Don't reward good behaviour Too quick to exclude
Home/school relationships	
Good parent/teacher relationships Open links with community	Poor communication Not honest about problems

Problems identified in the primary schools included the lack of resources available to them and the poor achievement of children compared with other schools. We have already discussed the language problems in schools in The Valley.

Some parents in both areas feel that their children could do better academically in other primary schools outside the area but are glad about the social contact the neighbourhood school brings. Parents talk about the 'other benefits' of being in the local school and they emphasise the importance of the child's personal achievement.

*I got a lot of stick from the little one's Dad who wanted them to go to a middle class school. The reality is that these kids are starting from below the level of the kids who speak the language. The culture is that they have to work even harder to get to the same level. It slows [my son] down but he slows himself down anyway. I don't think him being among different cultures is a bad thing – I don't want him to be a snob. (The Valley)*

*It doesn't seem like they're learning as much as kids from other schools. To be fair my oldest lad has done well. I'm not bothered that a child at another school might be on a higher reading book as long as he's doing the work that's set and doing it well that means he's achieving. (Kirkside East)*

Parents mainly judge the schools by their children's happiness. Parents are much less involved in secondary schools and don't always have a strong sense of what goes on in the school unless there is a problem. Problems in secondary schools were mostly to do with incidents that upset children or led to them being in trouble.

*They're very good at hiding things really. People think [the school's] wonderful, and it is good, but things do go off there. There's been a knife incident on a bus and weapons in school. We complained about the school bus and they don't want to know. 'How they get to school is the parents' responsibility'. (The Valley)*

*I'm not impressed with regard to bullying. I don't think they take the students seriously. They don't seem to reward when they get things right. If they say they're not good at something they're going to remember that for the rest of their life. Negative input when you're young affects you. My youngest daughter sings and plays instruments and they said they were going to do all sorts and they've not delivered anything - and now she's unruly but that's because she's had something held out to her and then snatched away. We've had a rocky time. She's had her spirit crushed. (Kirkside East)*

A small number of families in each area (5 in Kirkside East and 2 in The Valley) have particular problems with their children not attending secondary school. These parents found it difficult to talk about the schools because their experiences of going into school always related to trouble. This wasn't always blamed on the schools though.

*It's quite difficult because [my daughter] won't go there, but that's not the school it's [my daughter]. She just hates it. But they are good and quite supportive. It's quite difficult because unless you've got a child that's doing well you don't see the good side of it. I mean they are really good with [her] but you can't judge a school when your child doesn't go.*

Some couldn't make comments about the homework policy because their child didn't bring the work home. Two children in The Valley were waiting to be placed in schools following exclusion and one in Kirkside East was suspended, the others (4) were persistent truants.

## **Homework**

I asked parents about whether schools sent work home, whether they helped their children with homework and how confident they felt about supporting homework at primary and secondary level. I have dealt with primary and secondary schools separately because there are significant differences in parents' experiences of the two levels. The responses in both areas

are very similar. On the whole parents are happy with the work being sent home by both Primary and Secondary schools.

Primary schools vary widely in the amount of work they send home. Some children get no homework except reading, while some get work 4 nights a week. Most parents seem aware of the homework policy and are happy with the amount of homework.

When parents felt too little homework was set, some approached the school individually for work for their children.

*I've asked for more work. My kids don't like to go to bed early. They get up and they're tired at school and they don't concentrate so they bring it home. (The Valley)*

On the other hand a few parents were concerned about children having too much homework.

*Actually I think [my son] gets too much ... he's only just gone into Juniors. He has it four days a week and he's only just turned 8. It's such a jump he's shattered. (Kirkside East)*

Parents tried to get a balance between children's work at home and at school. Some worked with their young children at home if they got no homework 'I do it with her anyway'. Others tried not to push their children too much at home because they felt they had to work hard at school.

*I thought I'd be doing a lot more with them but I feel they do a lot at school. Just talking to them about it. I'd never sit down and do sums with her unless she wanted to. I'll support their learning. Probably because I'm confident - if I wasn't maybe I'd push them but I hate that. (The Valley)*

Muslim parents whose children also attend mosque school felt under extra pressure.

*They go to mosque school and they don't get back from there until 6. Then it's tea and they can't get their books out then. All Asian parents would say that. Every day is Mosque School so weekends is chill out time for everyone, no work at all.*

Parents described the different ways their children worked at home. Some children worked alone, some had their work checked, some asked for help when necessary and some worked together with a parent or sibling. Some parents had to spend a lot of time getting their children to work.

*[My son] does need it because he loses concentration so quickly in class. You've got to get him in the mood, then he'll sit there and get on with it. Like yesterday he'd forgotten what to do so he was having none of it 'I don't know what to do, why should I do it?' so I said sit down and think about what she told you, and he did it. (Kirkside East)*

Parents often don't like to push a child who is struggling.

*His confidence has gone so I don't do a lot of work with him. (The Valley)*



Most parents felt confident they could help with their children's work at Primary level. But some parents worried about being dyslexic, struggling with maths and simply not knowing enough.

*I'll give him a hand – whether I know what I'm talking about or not is another matter. (The Valley)*

Parents sometimes took the chance to learn alongside their children.

*I do help them. I'm dyslexic but I do try and help because I'm helping myself as well. (Kirkside East)*

The time that parents had to support their children was limited by work and other children.

*They all get homework and I try to help if they want me to. I try to help all of them. I could do more but I was concentrating on [one son] and I didn't have that time for [my other son]. (The Valley – 6 children)*

Some parents talked about getting support from other family members such as partners, children's brothers, sisters, aunts, grandparents and from teachers and local groups.

*If I can't my Dad will help. (Kirkside East)*

*His teacher worked with him and brought him on. (The Valley)*

*..at the education project they have homework classes where they can do homework. (The Valley)*

A few parents also talked about enrolling in classes to help them to support their children's work. Some courses were taken through the school or local adult education facilities.

*I think educationally I feel equipped to do it. Part of my motivation to do a computing course was for them. I was going to leave it but I thought I'd do it now and I do feel better about computers now. (The Valley)*

*It was one of the first courses I did– how to help your children with their Maths and English in conjunction with the school curriculum. (Kirkside East)*

Secondary school marks a big change in parents' relationship with their children, their children's attitudes and parents' ability to help. Some parents were confident that they could support their children.

*I know I can do it and can help them. (Kirkside East)*

But many more parents talked about having problems. Some did not complete secondary education themselves for various reasons including pregnancy and having grown up abroad.

*I won't be confident at all because I didn't do it at school – especially Maths. I don't know what I'll do, ask [my partner] I suppose. (Kirkside East)*

*It will be difficult because I didn't do GCSEs at school. (The Valley)*

Some did no exams or get any certificates, some simply never went back to pick them up.

*Don't ask me what I got because I never went back so I don't know. (The Valley)*

Some lacked confidence in certain subject areas that they had not done well in or because of problems they had at school. This affected their confidence in helping their children.

*I think I'll struggle because I'm dyslexic – intelligent but dyslexic. (Kirkside East)*

*I had problems with Maths and Science – I'll have to leave that to his father, my best grades were in languages. (The Valley)*

Some remembered the extreme difficulties they had that still haunted them.

*When I was a kid my mum and dad didn't help me. I went to a special school and I used to get called spastic, and a girl set my hair on fire once. (Kirkside East)*

Others were worried about coping because of how school work had changed since they were at school.

*Do I hell, computers and modern technology! (Kirkside East)*

*Not very confident. I don't really understand a lot of what [my son] is doing at school. When I do help he looks at me shocked. (The Valley)*

*I don't know half of it – the Maths is totally different. (The Valley)*

Parents were keen to help their children by 'having a bash' and 'trying to help'. Supporting homework was not just perceived as work related.

*Very confident,... I can't always help directly with work but emotionally I can. (The Valley)*

Although some parents lacked confidence themselves, they tried to help using 'dictionaries and encyclopaedias', doing computer courses and having a computer at home.

*I think I should be ok as long as I keep the computer course going – that should help with anything they do at school. (Kirkside East)*

However, some families needed help to make up for the lack of resources at home.

*I've written in his diary this week that we need more information for his IT homework, on how to get it done because we don't have a computer and we have to run around. There's one at the library and they do do after school clubs. (The Valley – just started secondary)*

At secondary level support from the school is particularly valuable, especially when it aids communication between parents and the school.

*Initially I didn't because I didn't know if I was doing it right. But I contacted the school and asked them to help and now it's fine. (The Valley)*

*She does come home with stuff and I think 'eh?' but I can put down in the planner that we didn't understand it, or I'll ring the teacher and ask what it is. (Kirkside East)*

Some parents were more confident than others in accessing these resources.

*Unless they send work home or I find out how to do it - otherwise I won't have a clue. (Kirkside East)*

*I'm very involved and I know where to go and what I need. If I've got a problem I'll talk to the teachers – but I'll always found out the facts first. (The Valley)*

Parents linked the difficulties of supporting children at secondary level with a change in their relationship. Secondary school was associated with children growing up and growing away from their parents. Some parents felt that this was inevitable and would help the child to become independent.

*He can support himself then. (Kirkside East)*

But increased independence brings with it worries about peer group pressure and the behaviour problems that may trigger school exclusion.

*When I got to that age I got in with certain groups and got expelled. (Kirkside East)*

Some parents also talked about children resisting their help.

*If I approached the school I think they would help but with older children they don't want your help because they're embarrassed. (Kirkside East)*

Most parents were confident that they knew what their children were doing in primary school and that they could help them with their work. At secondary school, however, parents were less aware of what went on. If their children seemed happy they tended not to worry. As they got older children become more distanced and parents worried about them becoming more independent. Schools helped if they communicated with parents and supported parental efforts to help children in their schoolwork.

Overall parents like local schools. Schools were praised for being local with good facilities, having a friendly environment with a good cultural mix, a positive approach that both rewards and disciplines children and for encouraging links with parents and the local community. Parents prefer their children to go to neighbourhood schools and the security and ease of contact this brings. At secondary level division between schools and parents and children and parents is often greater. Some parents move away or send their children out of the area because of school problems, but parents still prefer local schools.

### **3.3 Are the areas getting better or worse?**

I asked parents if they felt the areas were getting better, worse or staying the same. In the Valley there was a more distinct feeling of change for the better. This was linked to the early stages of New Deal for Communities with its promise of £50 million of investment over the next 10 years. In Kirkside East over a fifth of parents did think the area was getting better but nearly as many again saw change for the better in some areas happening alongside change for

the worse in others or as happening in cycles, going from worse to better to worse again and so on. Table 22 gives the breakdown of responses for both areas.

**Table 22: Area change in both areas**

	Kirkside East	The Valley	Total %
Getting better	14	22	36
Getting worse	10	11	21
Staying the same	13	12	25
Better then worse	7	3	10
Some things better some things worse	5	1	6
Can't say	1	1	2
Total	50	50	100

However, three times more families feel their area is getting better than the national average (10%)<sup>6</sup> and more than double the number of families feel their area is improving compared with the seven SRB areas before regeneration (16%)<sup>7,8</sup>.

## What's changing Kirkside East?

### Getting better

Three tangible interventions are changing Kirkside East for the better. These are:

- Family Learning Centre

The family learning centre opened in 1996 on the site of a recently closed secondary school. It offers free adult education courses with free childcare and targets the local population. Parents mentioned using the centre both for their own and family learning activities. Two of the parents were on job placements at the family learning centre at the time of the interview.

*Better. In some ways it's getting better. I think they're offering good facilities with the Family Learning Centre. They're offering people more opportunities and they're trying to improve the area.*

- Sure Start

Sure Start had received confirmation of funding in the area for 2 years from March 2000. As I was doing the interviews the programme was recruiting in the area and by the time I finished the interviews there were five Sure Start bases around the area, in community centres and primary schools. Some of the parents who were already active in schools were becoming involved with the Sure Start initiatives and helping to develop the programme.

*Sure Start is a good idea – I went to a coffee morning and it was the same people and same faces. We do sports day and it's the same people again.*

- Commercial investment in the area.

<sup>6</sup> Survey of English Housing (1995/96).

<sup>7</sup> MORI survey for the DETR (1996/97).

<sup>8</sup> The SEH and MORI figures represent how families with dependent children felt their areas had changed in the previous two years. A further 8% of families nationally had lived in the areas less than two years and so were not asked this question.

The old Kirkside East shopping centre had been knocked down and was being rebuilt during the first round of interviews. A large, new supermarket opened in November 2000 just after the end of the interviews. Recruitment for the supermarket had been coordinated through the Family Learning Centre. This involved guaranteed jobs for those who agreed to do a customised training course run jointly by the supermarket and the learning centre.

*There's a lot of interest in this area from other agencies, a lot of money gets put into this area so something's got to come out of it in the end. We get a lot of publicity through the door so you can do things if you want at [the learning centre] and the council putting courses on.*

Parents mentioned investment and job opportunities, police activity and the further development of provision for families as proof of interest in the area.

*I would say that the professionals are seeing that things need to change. Professionals are not easily trusted by people in the community, but they're trying to find different ways (of doing things) and they (the professionals) are beginning to listen.*

In addition specific parts of Kirkside East were described as getting better because the Council had moved certain people out, knocked down empty buildings and got rid of eyesores, provided more youth activities and done some 'tidying up'. The more proactive management helped.

*It is getting better because they are tidying the area up. They've got a new team with police and housing that goes straight to eviction.*

All this made families feel there was potential for more change.

### **Getting worse or staying the same**

Parents identified parts of Kirkside East that were getting worse. Poor facilities for children, no response from local services, moving difficult tenants in and disappearing facilities, all made particular streets decline.

Parents mentioned some very damaging problems, including: drugs – especially syringes; vandalism in parks and on empty houses; car theft and burning; violence and threatening behaviour to people and property; unemployment and poverty.

*It's a multitude of things. Drugs have a lot to do with the social climate. Drugs and unemployment.*

The problem constantly dragging the area down is 'untidiness'.

*It's just the litter, rubbish and the dogs that let it down.*

*Just general things – [it's] untidy, dirty - just those kinds of things. If they could just tidy it up a bit.*

Parents who feel the area is getting worse or staying the same have become resigned to the conditions.

*It's got worse since I was young and it's continuing, because you can complain until you're blue in the face and nothing's done so you have to learn to live with it.*

*I think it's got worse since I moved here, over a period of 10 or 12 years. Maybe it's just my personal circumstances. [You] just always seem to be fighting, but no matter where you live you want the best for your children and yourself of course.*

Many people seem to feel that it is almost hopeless to try and change things. Yet tidying up these areas, which should not be impossible, is one thing that could make area conditions better.

## **What's changing The Valley?**

### **Getting better**

Commitment to improving the area as a whole made parents feel that it was getting better.

An enveloping scheme, repairing the roofs, facades, paths and fences of private property, was ongoing in the area while I was doing the interviews and a few parents mentioned that this made the area look and feel better, especially as it also included the housing on the main road through the area.

*With the new input of money. New buildings to improve the environment. If all buildings are the same it looks old, so new buildings would add something.*

Several parents mentioned the active community groups in the area. These parents had all had contact with, or some active involvement in, one or more of the groups.

*I think that a couple of years ago I could have gone to a local residents' meeting and the questions would have been who's (the community forum) what's SRB - now they're on the front page of the (local paper). Just got to keep the impetus going. It is a slow process.*

At the time of the interviews reported here some of the parents who were optimistic about the plans in the early stages of investment voiced some concern about raising people's hopes.

*I hope it won't disappoint because people think there are a lot of things round the corner.*

The local community action forum had set up a community newspaper some time ago. This professionally produced magazine reports local news and parents mentioned how it countered negative stereotyping of the area by the local newspaper.

The combination of the facelift, the community groups and the newspaper generate a feeling of hope in the area and make a tangible difference.

*It looks better and feels better – there is a hope – you can't live without hope.*

These initiatives are largely the result of work done by local community groups. A lot of work was in the pipeline, helping to create optimism.

*Probably getting better because they're putting more money into the area. They're planning developments at the bottom of [a main road into The Valley]. There'll be more job opportunities for people in the area and if it gives school leavers a chance to get jobs there'll be less trouble at night.*

Parents also mentioned specific local changes that had an immediate impact. These included benches installed in a street, improving the security in a block of flats, more youth activities being available very locally and more action on crime.

*The Council shifted all the bullies and drug dealers and there's more community spirit than there used to be. Since the security systems people feel a lot better and the vandalism has stopped.*

In The Valley there was a definite sense of change being imminent with new investment, houses starting to sell, the possibility of local employment and more active community involvement. Together these actions seemed to generate more community spirit.

*I think the only way you can change the area is by doing it yourself. Things do change but you have to get involved.*

Other parents expressed similar views about the importance of community involvement in change.

### **Getting worse or staying the same**

Some parents felt The Valley was getting worse or staying the same with particular problems affecting the area as a whole – very similar to the problems in Kirkside East - violence, crime, drug dealing and drug use. The poor reputation of the area generates stereotyped views and racial tensions.

*There are more drugs coming in. All this area promotes is the stereotype – buy drugs, buy fast cars, and play loud music.*

*[It's getting] worse. It is bad but it's more the other side not this side. But (my son's) friends are over there and he tries to get over there and stay at his Nan's. The only trouble here is between the cultures but usually we all get on.*

These problems put intense pressure on families and children. The unsafe conditions restrict normal activities like playing out (see section on changing childhoods).

*Getting worse because of the boredom with the kids. There's nothing for them to do so they destroy the empty properties. After school and in the holidays there's [the school club] but it's not for youngsters and the older ones are just caught in the middle.*

In parts of the area empty buildings, visible neglect and neighbours with serious problems made parents feel that their immediate neighbourhood was in decline. Some tenants were critical of the council's letting policy that concentrate families with problems together.

*Nothing's ever going to change. Because of the reputation. Because they keep putting money in and there's nothing to show for it*

Some of those who felt the areas were staying the same despaired of the money coming into the area making any difference.

Government and local authority regeneration initiatives are targeting both areas. Some community-based groups in The Valley are also working to tackle specific aspects of the area. Some of the interviewees were aware of the areas' potential and pointed out examples of where things were definitely improving on particular streets, rows of houses or blocks of flats. However, as many again felt that there was little change in the areas or that things, especially crime and drugs, were actually getting worse. People who have lived in the areas for a long time and those who are involved in community activities appear to be the most positive.

### 3.4 What would help families most?

I asked parents what three things would most help their families at the moment. By far the biggest difference would be more money. Activities for children came second a long way behind. Moving came third and other things were much less significant. Table 23 gives the breakdown of the responses in each area.

**Table 23: What would help families most?**

	Kirkside East	The Valley	Total
Money	29	28	57
Children: more and different services and activities	10	21	31
Moving	9	12	21
Employment	7	9	16
Area improvement: cleaner less bad media coverage, council to do things, safer	10	2	12
Home related – more space, garden, shed, decoration.	5	5	10
Holiday	3	5	8
Health: cure for eczema, support, counselling	5	2	7
Nothing	5	2	7
Transport: having a car	4	1	5

A few mentioned wanting to win the lottery – laughing as they said it. Money was often linked to paying for something specific like a holiday or just being able to afford things.

*Money covers a lot. I know they say money can't buy you happiness but it goes a long way. It's hard to think of three things. (Kirkside East)*

*Bit more money – not too much, just more comfortable. (The Valley)*

In The Valley nearly half wanted more and different services for children. Just under a fifth of the parents in each area thought that moving would help their families. Work was the next



most important thing, both getting jobs and keeping them. Other things that would help were home improvements, a particular child's needs, health, transport. Sometimes people just wanted more intangible things like improving the family's well being, gaining confidence, spending time together and resolving family problems. Seven people in total said that they couldn't think of anything that would help their family immediately, adding that they were 'content' as they were.

## Conclusions

In Kirkside East and The Valley parents were struggling to deal with problems that were thrown up by living in these two low-income areas. The focus of the majority of problems that parents faced was children; the harmful influences in the area and the potential for getting involved in dangerous activities, the limitations of the schools and the tensions between children in the areas, exacerbated by the lack of facilities for all ages.

Emerging issues from the first round of interviews fall into three main groups:

### Family strategies

The first is not about the areas but about the families themselves. Not all the families were affected by changes in the areas in the same way. Poorer families struggle the most in the areas. Some of these families felt trapped in the areas with little support or protection against negative factors, and no way out. The families we interviewed were often finding the pressures hard to cope with but were finding ways of coping with their current situation. The help of family members, friends, local groups or professional support was crucial but often sheer determination and self-motivation ensured survival.

Some families had developed support networks to help them to cushion the negative influences of the area on their families' well being. These networks usually revolved around relatives and friends but sometimes involved community groups and community activities.

Families with more resources could afford to make choices about whether to move and where to send their children to school but were often torn by a continuing commitment to the area despite the arguments in favour of leaving or to access resources outside the area. Some had cars and used facilities both inside and outside the areas. Some of these parents were fairly well off and stayed at home with their children while their partner went out to work.

Other parents' options to travel outside the area or to move away were curtailed by unemployment, low incomes and the limited work opportunities. This was particularly true for lone parents.

### Services and conditions

Secondly, area factors and services were inconsistent across the areas. Not all provision or facilities were bad. Some housing was attractive, some immediate neighbourhoods friendly, some schools were rated excellent by parents and some facilities were very accessible. This made people feel satisfied with the areas and their accommodation.

But some housing, especially property owned by the council, was in disrepair, some immediate neighbourhoods were problematic, some schools lacked resources and had poor reputations; some facilities, such as supervised play and youth provision were not available for all families and some age groups were not catered for making people feel frustrated and despairing of change in the areas. Thus there is a very localised sense of satisfaction and discontent in the areas. The fact that these services are working in some places at some times means that there is the potential for them to be made more consistent across the areas.

Satisfaction decreased dramatically when parents talked about the areas as places to bring up children. Using their own childhoods as comparisons, parents talked about an increase in fear of danger for their own children. At the same time they felt that supervised activities and discipline in general were in decline. Over half wanted to stay in the areas signalling a broad commitment to the areas amongst families.

Parents were mostly satisfied with the schools they sent their children to, especially at primary level, even though the school attainment results do not compare favourably with national averages. Things that worked for schools were their location close to the family home, good facilities, a welcoming atmosphere, positive attitudes towards children, a clear set of rules that allowed for children's behaviour to be rewarded or punished appropriately and a good home/school relationship. In particular secondary schools helped parents to help their children with their schoolwork, as long as parents were in touch with the school.

## **Community relations**

Thirdly, many parents stressed the importance of good, local community relations, both informal small-scale activities, especially between neighbours, and more formal local groups. Programmes that had been designed to promote change, such as Sure Start (both areas) and New Deal for Communities (The Valley), were being welcomed, sometimes cautiously, in the areas. Some people we interviewed were involved in the development of these programmes or had come to know of them through consultation exercises and new resources in the areas. The first round of interviews took place early on in the lives of these programmes, however, and there were those who were unaware of them, and so far untouched by them. Some preferred to keep 'themselves to themselves'.

Community activities at all levels were popular when they helped to create more support and facilities for parents and children and when they tackled the image of the areas. But there was real concern amongst families that such activities were sometimes short-lived whereas they needed to develop, extend their cover and become sustainable. This required continuing inputs.

Race relations formed part of the wider pattern of community relations, particularly in The Valley. Most families found race relations in general good, but recognised underlying tensions and strains, particularly in resources, stereotypes and social conditions. Parents felt that the local services were not meeting many different needs of such a diverse community.

These conclusions suggest that area conditions do make it harder to live on a low income in a low income area. Area factors such as the local environment, services and schooling are not all bad in the areas. This suggests that there are real possibilities for effective interventions in Kirkside East and The Valley, given the right interventions at different levels, to tackle provision inside the areas and the negative images of them from outside. Children are a key focus for both families and for policy makers.

This report outlines the first stage of a longitudinal study. In the next rounds of interviews we will be following up issues introduced here and bringing in new areas for discussion including health and work history. Future reports of the study will include comparative data across Leeds, Sheffield and the two areas in the parallel East London study. The 12 Areas Study will also continue to track change in the areas in a broader context, using national socio-economic indicators over time. We hope to reflect how these 100 families see all the changes under way over the next period.

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